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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Three Versions on a Poe Story: The Masques of the Red Death submitted by Slobodan Sucur in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Comparative Literature.

M. V. Dimic

E. D. Blodgett

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24 June 1998

Abstract

The study espouses a type of 'blended theoretics,' in relation to "The Masque of the Red Death." The chosen tale is subjected to three analyses, and subsequently, each particular analysis forms a chapter onto itself, as follows: (1) structuring the tale (building up the meaning) (2) deconstructing it (negating the holistics of it, by arguing that the *unity of effect* is ironical, in the sense that the 'viewing of disunity' unifies it) (3) theorizing the tale at hand (a self-reflexive discourse by the critic (myself) that reconciles the 'tension' of both positive (structural) and negative (deconstructionist) readings of the chosen Poe text). Chapter three (the theoretical approach) analyzes the interplay between chapters one and two, whereby it becomes the actual embodiment of the ultimate, Poe-esque "unity of effect," by way of my 'blending the theoretics.' The study's discourse in turn exposes how this tale's identity (as any other by Poe) risks being under-interpreted (hence my varied reading of it), because its purpose is to expose the *mechanics* of Poe's aesthetic-literary formulation by imitating it 'in a critical fashion' on my part.

This study is dedicated to the unusually prolific period of the 1830s and 40s, when several styles merged to produce multi-faceted literary artists, such as Poe, who have allowed the process of *criticism* to remain perpetual.

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Introduction

For several years now I have been particularly interested in re-assessing Edgar Allan Poe's writing in a manner that will hope to bring about a clear and logical understanding of his textual "unity of effect"—a phrase which he so often emphasized, both in his theories and stories. The problematic nature of defining the Poe-esque style of writing has been in part caused by the one-sidedness and subsequent polarization of much criticism about the author, over the past century-and-a-half.

Criticism has generally, either in a literal or implied fashion, tended to dismiss the Poe canon as being obscure in its general importance in the history of letters; his oeuvre has either been dismissed as being too narrow in thematic scope or as being too personal in its impact because of its universal symbolic qualities, and therefore too broad and all-encompassing to be effectively analyzed and assigned a 'proper spot' within literary history. This is not to say that Poe has not attained the status of an international writer, but rather, that this status has been merely left unaccounted for, as if his writing 'alone' in some way lacks the ability to propel itself forward and must require external impetus (biographical sensationalism, et cetera).

To assess Poe's writing in a comprehensive fashion, we must take into account all of the nuances and stylistic-textual shades of his work, and this is to be effectively done by offering the open analysis of a 'blended theoretics.' In order to expose all facets of this author's writing, and the reason why it is best understood when looked at from several angles, we must employ a type of implicit structuralism that is structural in ideology but not in method, more like Barthes' post-structural phase, deconstruction (of which there are many variants, extreme and somewhat conservative), and a meta-theoretical-philosophical analysis (a fusion of these already 'open' perspectives that becomes more of a non-approach, a cleaner analysis that does not ascribe to any particular 'ism') when dealing with the Poe canon. Only with this type of triangular reasoning will we be able to eliminate the obscure and anomalous position of his writings. Structuralist ideology offers a 'building up' of consistent meaning, whereas deconstruction offers a negation of the consistency of meaning; simultaneously, the theoreticism of this thesis attempts to establish a mean-

ingful 'cause and effect' relationship between all elements of the text that is being analyzed. The theorizing of the critic therefore offers a self-reflexive position amid the tension of positive (structuralist) and negative (deconstructionist) elements within Poe's general model of writing, which is about life, death, and their self-conscious interpretation.

Poe's writing attempted to explain the universe of man by way of the paradox of the 'fictive fact,' through the implementation of a scientific and rational tone within a fictional text. His writing is therefore best assessed without being classified within any particular literary 'tradition' (such as Romanticism, Gothicism, et cetera) but rather described as being particularly "Poe-esque," because we are here dealing with an internationally seminal writer (who developed the 'horror story' proper and the ratiocinative (detective) tale by re-molding the elements of the former, and who laid down the groundwork of 'pure' poetry and the main devices of the "Theatre of the Absurd"). We can therefore effectively expose the 'meaning and impact' of his writing by mimicking it in a critical fashion through our role as audience and interpreter.

My hope is that this study will, by the time of its conclusion, offer the following answer: Poe's unified effect works, by 'offering' alternative readings of the text at hand, varied readings that are *all* interrelated since one reading eventually brings about the opportunity for another. And, no matter how narrow-minded an approach the critic takes, the Poe-esque tale will offer that 'possibility of reading' as well, this susceptibility to reading being in keeping with the duping and hoax-like atmosphere of that form of tale. I shall therefore offer a three-sided analysis (the blended approach) to demonstrate that all are indeed supported by the Poe tale, and more importantly, that his "unity of effect" is inherently neither concrete (structuralist) nor ironic (deconstructionist), a struggle which decades of critics have fought over, but *spectral* (structurally fluid, whereby the several undead characters are precisely accounted for, since they are always 'doomed to re-surface' at the dénouement). This multiple analysis will also prove that the Gothic element in Poe's tales is subsequently not a part of the *effect*, but rather the exhaust of that effect (in the sense that any effect will self-suffice, as long as it is "unified," whereby the Gothic decor is subordinate 'in the act of being employed' to sustain that final impression). We will expose this by looking at Poe's

interweaving of 'grotesque' and 'arabesque' elements and by analyzing the difference between generic irony (saying one thing and doing another) and refined irony (Poe's inscription of multiple perspectives into the text).

It was because of the inherent 'multi-fluency' of Poe's aesthetics that I have chosen to give the study the following title: *Three Versions on a Poe Story: The Masques of the Red Death.* Why exactly this, one might ask? (I can already envision some critics saying that "Usher" or "Berenice" are perhaps better suited for this type of analysis.) I have chosen this particular tale precisely because we still have a final return of the 'undead' even in this text that is actually a more concrete process, oddly enough, than in all the other tales: Death (the masked character) returns as the undead since death 'cannot' be dead, theoretically speaking. Otherwise, if it were so, its presence would not return, again and again, within Poe's tales. And its aura is certainly problematized, for there is no face 'behind' the mask, and the figure (not the character) of death is *in* the masquerade. These complexities of meaning will become more evident in the process of analysis as I pay closer attention to Poe's formulation of "truth as consistency" and the "impossibility of axioms," an interlaced feature that is *demonstrated* in the "Red Death" (it is defined in *Eureka*), and which allows for literary criticism erroneously to read the sign of the 'Other' and of otherness via this lack of axioms into Poe's aesthetic formulae.

The tale was first published in *Graham's Magazine* for May 1842 under the title of "The Mask of the Red Death. A Fantasy." It was revised later by Poe and appeared in the *Broadway Journal* for July 1845 under its current title of "The Masque of the Red Death." A third version appeared in a compilation of Poe's works which was published posthumously in 1850 by Griswold and differs slightly in spelling and punctuation from the 1845 version (Mabbott 2:670). This last version can thus be said to have been 'posthumously edited' (tampered with). As far as authenticity is concerned, something which is relevant to a scholarly study like this one, it can be said that the 1845 version is the most 'authentic' because it was last touched 'by the hand of Poe.' It is because of this that I have used Harrison's 1902 edition of the tale for this study, since it reprints that revised and authentic version. Mabbott offers some interesting introductory insights

as to possible sources for the tale, but unfortunately reprints Griswold's edition of the text. This is perhaps a minor error, but I prefer for the sake of accuracy that we look at the version which appeared in the *Broadway Journal*. The greatest difference is between the first and second version of the tale, because the latter drops one phrase entirely, which Prospero speaks: "—Will no one stir at my bidding?—stop him and strip him, I say, of these reddened vestiges of Sacrilege" (Harrison 4:319-20)! Davidson speaks of how many of Poe's works were reviewed and revised, and that in the case of the second version of the "Red Death" tale, a salient compression is achieved, "in which very little fact and information are given but in which the tone and movement are all" (154).

Most readers will consider a mere listing of sources which 'might have' inspired such a tale to be a nuisance, especially because one cannot say anything definitive, but I offer such a list nonetheless. I offer it primarily because it adds a more solid explanation for why I chose the "Red Death" tale for analysis, but also because a morass of sources and intertextual currents at least in part explains why I consider this tale to be a comprehensive example of Poe's artistry. Put simply, we can read Prospero's masquerade as being a type of symbolic intertext, a reading which in turn would define the intertext as being both a scholarly indulgence and a genuine lure to critical reading; the possible sources which I list can therefore be read as a historical, complementary exposé of the intertextual flavor of the tale.

Renza speaks of how Poe's "Prince Prospero" is perhaps a reference to Shakespeare's artist-figure, Prospero, in *The Tempest* (28). Pollin believes that several works contributed to the creation of the "Red Death" tale. His main point is that Poe was influenced by Hugo's "Hernani" of 1829, not in its original version, but in a crude variation that was imported to the American theatre by the British actor William Barrymore, whose play-script was a minor variation of Kenney's English production of "Hernani" in London in 1831, which itself was a variation on the original (7). The American variation was produced by a certain Wemyss under the title "Zanthe" and Poe would have probably seen a performance in January of 1842, and was perhaps influenced by its wild facade (10). Wemyss spoke of the play's unusually large cost owing to the presence of a "'brass band, four drummers,...many pounds of wax candles, red fire,' and lavish dresses and

properties, all of which made it a great success" (9). Pollin summarizes as follows: "I surmise that Poe used the name of *Hernani* for its prestigious effect, when he had witnessed in reality an inferior version in *Zanthe*" (11). He is also quick to point out that Byron's poem "Darkness" (1816) was also an obvious influence, owing to its conclusion which resonates in Poe's tale: "The winds were wither'd in the stagnant air / And the clouds perish'd! Darkness had no need / Of aid from them—She was the Universe" (76). He then says that Byron in turn had borrowed from Pope's "Dunciad" (1728), so that some critics may label this as the direct source for the conclusion of Poe's tale: "Light dies before thy uncreating word; / Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall, / And universal Darkness buries All" (78). Pollin finally adds that Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) could also be a potential source for Poe's tale, as exemplified in the following reference to a "mock fair" near Windsor while the plague is attacking England: "The park was speckled by tents, whose flaunting colours and gaudy flags,...added to the gaiety of the scene...The gay dance vanquished, the green sward was strewn with corpses, the blue air above became fetid with deathly exhalations" (82).

Regan believes that the sources for Poe's tale are mostly from Hawthorne's repertoire. He says that "Howe's Masquerade" bears a resemblance to the "Red Death" tale in several instances, especially when General Howe says the following to a cloaked intruder: "*Villain, unmuffle yourself*...you pass no farther" (74)! This phrase we are then to equate with Prospero's "Uncase the varlet" which Poe changes in 1845 to "Seize him and unmask him" (Harrison 4:319). Regan also cites "Lady Eleanore's Mantle" as being a possible source, because the "disease Lady Eleanore brings to Boston is a 'red brand' at first 'conferred like a noble's star, or an order of knighthood,' only upon the well-born who attend the Governor's ball in her honor" (76).

Mabbott cites as a possible source Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1353), "where the narrators are members of a group who retire to a remote castle to avoid the plague" (2:668). He also cites as a source Campbell's *Life of Petrarch* (1841), in which there is a tale of a "nobleman named Barnabo, who during a plague shut himself up in his castle and set a sentinel to ring a bell if anyone approached. Yet a party entered unannounced, and Barnabo, finding the sentry dead, fled to the

forest where, it was reported, he too died" (2:668-9). The most concrete source which exists, and which Mabbott cites, is perhaps the 16th letter of N. P. Willis' "Pencillings by the Way," in which he describes a masquerade that was held in Paris during the cholera epidemic of 1832: "At a masque ball at the *Théâtre des Variétés*...at the celebration of the *Mi-Carême*, or half-lent...were some two thousand people...in fancy dresses...and one man, immensely tall, dressed as a personification of the *Cholera* itself, with skeleton armor, bloodshot eyes, and other horrible appurtenances of a walking pestilence" (2:668). Another source, which psychiatrists would immediately pinpoint, is that "Virginia Poe had burst a blood vessel in singing during January 1842...[and] blood had gushed from her mouth" (2:677).

Cary cites among possible sources the following: Disraeli's *Vivian Grey*, Manzoni's *I Promesssi Sposi*, Eichendorff's *Ahnung und Gegenwart*, Ainsworth's *Old St. Paul's*, Coleridge's "Allegoric Vision," De Quincey's *Klosterheim*, and Mally's *Voyages et aventures des trois princes de Sarendip* (76). Also cited is Poe's own vivid encounter with the cholera plague in Baltimore during 1831, which, we may speculate, was also a source for "King Pest" (78). The most interesting possible source which Cary cites, Poe would have come across while scanning the May 11th, 1839 issue of the New York *Expositor*, a short-lived weekly journal of foreign and domestic intelligence, literature, science, and the fine arts (77). The item in question is the following:

> *A Masked Ball Anecdote.*—In Russia, masquerades are very frequent during the Christmas holidays; and even when merely a ball is to be given, it is customary to place lights in the windows as a sign that masks will be admitted, though not invited. During the Christmas of 1834, a ball was given at St. Petersburg, at the residence of a nobleman, and the windows of the house were illuminated, as an invitation to masks. A considerable number of persons came masked, and among them there appeared a party in the Chinese costume, carrying on a palanquin an individual whom they called their Lord, and whom they treated with great courtesy. They placed the palanquin in the middle of the room, and commenced dancing round it one of their national dances. This being ended the group dispersed and mingled with the rest of the company. They spoke French with perfect fluency, and made themselves exceedingly agreeable. After some time, they began, one by one, to withdraw; and at last, all imperceptibly slipped away, the person in the palanquin still sitting motionless and in dignified silence. The remainder of the guests began to depart, and the room being gradually thinned of company, the attention of those who remained was directed almost exclusively to the grave and silent Chinese.—At length, the nobleman, at whose residence the entertainment was given, stepped up to the mysterious figure in the palanquin, and politely begged him to remove his mask, that he and his family might see to whom they were indebted for the amusement which the party of Chinese maskers had afforded them. No reply was made to this request either by word or gesture. Curiosity was naturally augmented by this strange conduct. The silent figure took no notice of anything passing around him, and at length, patience being exhausted the

> nobleman himself removed the mask. To the horror of all present, the countenance of a corpse was exposed to view!.... (77-8)

Gerber cites as a possible source an etiquette book, *The Canons of Good Breeding*, which Poe would have reviewed in *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* in November of 1839; he specifically refers to a chapter entitled "Of the General Manner," in which the author advises the reader not to try to escape from the world through excessive pleasure (as Prospero and his courtiers try to do) because pleasure and vice are intimately related (52). The author says: "The glad in countenance and the gay in conduct, are many times secretly the most unhappy of men. The glitter and racket of the fashionable world cover much that is miserable. Melancthon used to compare a court-life to books of tragedies, which on the outside are adorned with gold and purple bindings, but within contain tales of distress" (52-3). Another work which is cited is Edward Young's *The Centaur Not Fabulous*, in which the man of pleasure is identified as the fabled Centaur; Chiron, the most celebrated of centaurs, was the product of what the author calls "the very first of Masquerades" (53). Young concludes that the idea of the masquerade was always subservient to love as a means of escape which perpetuated the pleasure, and he connects in several places such pleasures with pestilence: "What an extravagant dominion does *Pleasure* exercise over us? It is not only the pestilence that walketh in darkness; but an arrow that destroyeth at noon-day. The moon hides her face at our midnight enormities; and the morning blushes on our unfinished debauch" (53). Another more probable source that Gerber cites is Felicia Hemans' poem, "The Revellers," which Poe would have come across at least twice, in January of 1836, when he discussed Hemans' characteristic themes and style, and in October of the same year, when he reviewed rather thoroughly Chorley's biographical work, *Memorials of Mrs. Hemans* (53). In her poem, Hemans tells of the festivity of a ball ended finally by death, or at least a fear of death, a ball that is contaminated by a "mournful glance" that has no place in such festivity (53-4).

Suffice it to say that it is difficult to label any one source as being a 'direct' one, especially inasmuch as intertextuality is oftentimes coincidental, rather than intentional. On a more analytical note, it can be said that the "Red Death" tale perhaps offers itself to the critic's eye as the most concrete attainment of Poe's "totality" of aesthetics and theory. It is a Gothic tale, a semi-ratiocina-

tive one, an ironic-hoaxical one, and a 'pure' prose-poem of form and movement: it is Gothic-like because of its facade (I should rather say Poe-esque), ratiocinative because of the "mummer's" culpability and possible explication within the text, ironic because there is always a subtler undertone of meaning and 'tension' occurring in Poe's writing (political, literary, and so on) whereby the symbolism becomes multi-faceted, and finally 'poetic,' because its primary impressiveness is of tone and structure rather than of meaning—but *both* facets (structure and meaning) are accounted for by textual stylistics, and in that process of reconciliation rests the final success of "unity." As a matter of fact, the "Red Death" tale was published in the same year as Poe's most definitive comment on the "unity of effect" and its application to the short story (1842):

> A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accomodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents—he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at last painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed; and this is an end unattainable by the novel. (Mabbott xviii-xix)

Perhaps it is because of the multi-fluent oddness of the tale (its susceptibility to multiple interpretations) that Poe, in his many revisions, finally decided to replace the word "Mask" with "Masque" in the title. It was not meant to evoke the Elizabethan masque (a type of play, et cetera) but rather, being excessively pedantic when it came to words, Poe preferred "Masque" because it grammatically combines both Mask and Masquerade, for the tale espouses the conflict between identity and group (between the mask and the masquerade). It is interesting to note that while the "Mob" (as Poe called it) is given the sign of the masquerade, of the grouped revellers, the idea of identity is given the sign of the 'mask,' and this theoretically bonds the latter, however partially, with the former. Poe has thus effectively problematized the question of identity (via the "mummer") by structuring it so that it has no place to arise but from *within* the masquerade. And now, to the analysis.

(1) Structuring the Meaning

When attempting a reading of Poe's type of short story, we must take care not to be overwhelmed by the mass of symbols and ornaments that abound in the textual artistry. Otherwise, the over-indulgent critic sometimes risks going off on a tangent, which happens easily with "The Masque of the Red Death." While offering several chances for original readings, this tale appears most coherent if a single, structured interpretation is brought about, and this requires that we pay attention to the tale's particulars of development (leading up to the entrance of the character who masquerades as the Red Death) which contribute to a total effect. This analysis, if I am to be specific, is a type of 'implicit structuralism,' in the sense that it offers *one* possible interpretation. It thereby becomes structured by way of process, by way of the 'building up of interpretation.' The method of analysis itself is therefore not structuralist per se, but the ideological stance is indeed 'structuralist' in the implicit/textual sense of the word, because all 'single' interpretations automatically possess the critic's own *thought structure*. Perhaps it is best to offer Genette's thoughts on the presence of 'structure' in all coherent interpretation, so as to better describe the implicit 'structurality' of all interpretation: "*A priori*, of course, structuralism as a method is based on the study of structures wherever they occur; but to begin with, structures are not directly encountered objects—far from it; they are systems of latent relations, conceived rather than perceived, which analysis constructs as it uncovers them. Furthermore, structuralism is not only a method; it is also what Ernst Cassirer calls a 'general tendency of thought,' or as others would say (more crudely) an ideology,..." (68).

The introduction is always significant in Poe's tales, for it embodies the factors that are to develop into the 'enigma' which in turn spreads over the body of the narrative. We read the following: "THE 'Red Death' had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal—the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution" (Harrison 4:250). These initial lines set up the proposition that the Red Death of which the narrator

speaks is well grounded, since it has "long" been present, and is both "fatal" and "hideous." Thus, it lacks decorum and cannot be eradicated once it takes hold, and, most significantly, "blood" is both "its Avatar and its seal." In the primary instance, this last interjection gives this pestilence (the Red Death) a mark of authenticity, via the word "seal." This is the meaning which arises if we look upon seal as referring to a type of stamp or emblem, and so, blood becomes the sign that this disease is present. Seal may also be referring to an instrument which keeps something 'closed up'; in this case, blood seals the Red Death within the afflicted individual. Thus, blood deems this disease both authentic (real) and keeps it secure within the individual who has been exposed to it. But, we must remember that blood is the Red Death's "Avatar" as well.

This term technically brings the following logic into the opening sentences of the tale: blood, if the actual avatar of the phenomenon of the Red Death, is the grounded-human representation of it within the narrative, while the Red Death itself is thoroughly absent from the text at hand. Therefore, since avatar signifies that a 'descension' of this near supernatural disease has occurred, so that its only existence within the text is being filtered through the symbol of blood, we have a dissociation of concepts occurring in the introductory paragraph. In short, blood becomes the appearance of the Red Death 'in bodily form,' but the conceptual reality of that disease remains absent from the textual realm, from Prospero's dominion. When we read the tale in its entirety, we are therefore only perusing "the redness and the horror of blood," as Poe indicates right away in the introductory lines. The Red Death itself remains an enigma, which is constantly re-emphasized as being an enigma when the ebony clock makes its rounds, and the lynching of "the mummer" (the mask of this enigma) brings no explication of the source of the tale's horror, but only that of its symbolic embodiment (the mummer), which logically ceases to exist after being grasped, since a symbol alone and without its referent (the Red Death) cannot be explicated.

The tale can be interpreted as being a demonstration of the 'paradoxical quality' of all rituals (in this case a religious festivity *en masse*), whereby the celebration of the godhead (in this case the Red Death), via human offerings of tribute (in this case the release of blood as the "avatar" of the unspeakable Word), necessitates the ultimate dissolution of those who pay tribute, because of

the sacrificial stance that they take in proceeding with ritual 'tributes' (in this case we have a planned masquerade). In other words, only by spilling blood, an act that symbolically links the individual with the Red Death, are the revellers to be brought to 'a state of grace,' in religious terms. They may have secluded themselves in the "castellated abbey" from the disease's active form (as the Red Death that devastates the countryside), but in their ritual of revelry, via the masquerade, they are enacting a tribute to this godhead, now in the form of an avatar of blood, that rests outside the realm of 'human comprehension.' And so, Poe has in the introductory paragraph subtly stated that the tale will outline the effect of 'dogmatic behavior' on the individual, *per se*. Taken a step further, the tale is about to outline that, counter to T. S. Eliot's reflection on Poe's artistry, it is indeed better that all ideas are "*entertained* rather than believed" (Elmer 3). This tale outlines all too clearly what occurs when one takes belief to the extreme, through Prospero's overindulgence in ritualism, that becomes paradoxically a 'fanaticism turned social realism,' via the revolutionary 'redness' of it all, and of the great levelling effect of the masquerade on individual aspiration itself. And in turn, the concept of faith (the revelry) becomes fated (the grim dénouement) because the "scarlet stains" on the victim "shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men" (Harrison 4:250).

Perhaps I should at this point, before going any further, explain my use of 'social realism' with reference to Prospero's masquerade. I have said that the masquerade, the ritualized behavior of the courtiers, becomes a 'fanaticism turned social realism'; I have dropped the 'ist' of social(ist) realism so as to more easily apply the concept to this particular text—the meaning of such a concept is therefore to be found directly in the phrase itself. Put another way, Prospero makes of his fanaticism, of his ideological fervor, a 'social reality' within the text, since the entire milieu is smothered with such an ideology. This is obviously similar to 'socialist' realism itself, as established at the 1934 Congress in the Soviet Union, but I speak of it as being 'social' realism so as to make it more immediately and grammatically relevant to Prospero's exploits, especially because Poe wrote this piece long before 1934. We should thus keep in mind that 'social realism' is, within Prospero's milieu, a type of *theory before a theory*—before social(ist) realism. Or, as Robin says,

"realism is a self-evident value that cannot be questioned" (64); this is at least how Prospero wishes the courtiers to perceive his own ideology. Robin also asks a question which is relevant to Prospero's exploits, and which begs an answer: "If [socialist realism] does not merely describe reality as it is [as do typical 19th century realist texts, not that they do this either], what does it add to the description" (59)? I would answer the question as follows: social(ist) realism allows for the 'fabrication of a reality' which in turn complements its own ideological stance/foundation, makes it valid, via the use of 'imagination' (hence its fundamental borrowing from romanticism, an even greater borrowing than that of realism). This is seen in Prospero's behavior. Robin also offers a brief summary of what socialist realism requires to succeed, and some points are uncannily similar to the set-up of the "Red Death" tale. It requires that dreams be dreamt which are "based on the tendencies of real development" (Prospero's seclusion from a real plague), it "requires the depiction of reality in motion" (the moving masquerade itself), and it requires an expression of "the new" (a type of thematic, generic originality which Prospero is 'responsible' for) (60). Mozejko also provides a summary of socialist realism: "...we encounter in Socialist Realism a certainty of convictions, biased judgements and narrow-minded assertions solely determined by or based upon a dogma which leaves no room for any individualized shaping of the presented world" (55). I would in addition like to say that such total, socialized realism is still an 'individualization,' but only of those who create this program (in this case Prospero), and hence, such individuality is both incongruous and transient. Mozejko further adds that because in socialist realism there is an obedient referral to "higher truth," then "in terms of 'creative production' the reader is compelled to accept *kitsch*," via ideological puppetry (55). Such imitation is embodied in Prospero's masquerade.

Needless to say, my attempt to read the mechanics of social(ist) realism into the "Red Death" tale may be considered odd, tentative, tangential, and so on. I thus offer these few sentences which might clear up this interpretive dilemma. The most obvious reason why I have tied social(ist) realism to Prospero's masquerade is because this masquerade negates the free will of the courtiers, who must partake of this indulgence; the only figure to break this code of behavior is the

"mummer," who, we can say, creates his own spectacle and indulgence. It might also be said that I have misinterpreted a decadent capitalist masquerade as exhibiting certain similarities with socialist theory; this would then constitute a serious misinterpretation on my part, and I apologize if it constitutes this. But such a misinterpretation becomes less tangential, or at least more perceptive, if we keep in mind that decadence requires a sustaining of full individualism (that has obvious affinities with libertinism and the Rococo period, among other things), an individualism, that if sustained for a long enough period, will lead, if we speak as literary historians, to modernist fragmentation and other avant-garde developments (all of this being considered asocial, or in some cases, anti-social). Such decadent, proto-modernist fragmentation I maintain is not present in the "Red Death" tale because of the masquerade's presence as a total and totalizing force. The greatest difficulty in accepting my reading of social(ist) realism in conjunction with Poe's tale is that traditionally, we tend to think of Marxism, communism, and socialism as being in opposition to decadent forms of behavior, which are to a degree present also in Prospero's revel (as Marie Bonaparte pointed out in her Freudian reading of the tale). As such, by saying that the masquerade enacts the mechanics of social(ist) realism, I am, whether I like it or not, committing what some would call a misreading—I am claiming that the masquerade is both decadent and, more importantly, a prototype of socialist-realist art. Such a claim is not only paradoxical but is considered improper. But I have applied this impropriety to my reading of the text because, eventually, at some stage in the discussion, it is more perceptive of Poe's artistry. Because of the imposing totality of Prospero's masquerade, I cannot label it merely decadent before comparing it to social(ist) realism, because this would be a fundamental error. In order to label something as only decadent and nothing else, we require that an obvious frame-of-reference be present in Prospero's world. This frame-of-reference, while it is still present (as I will discuss in the later chapters), is deliberately covered up by Prospero, who attempts to close his world off to the outside. This is the major reason why I have spoken of social(ist) realism with regard to the masquerade and not of a mere 'social reality.' While it is obvious that the revel is socially real to the masqueraders, it is still ideologically contaminated via Prospero's program of seclusion, and thus, the revel is much more

obviously ideological than a mere 19th-century realist text, Prospero having borrowed from romanticism. And, needless to say, my interpretation is running against the grain, so to speak, since it implies that, because the masquerade has affinities with both decadence and social(ist) realism, so too are socialism and its artistic theory the products of a "late degenerating capitalist society" (as Marx would say).

It is the second paragraph of the tale that introduces us to the "castellated abbey" which is "an extensive and magnificent structure, the creation of the prince's own eccentric yet august taste" (Harrison 4:250). The reader's gaze is now transferred, by the shift in narrative focus, from the enigmatic Red Death itself to Prospero's attempt at walling his company within his own "eccentric" design. The term eccentric denotes something that is 'off centre,' whereby Prospero's position as a type of cultural and political leader of his dominions is given a more ominous connotation. Now that he is 'off centre,' it can be said that the ensuing masquerade will inevitably and indirectly appear as a type of symbolic tribute to the primary enigma itself, the Red Death, that is indeed the actual, focal 'centre' of this tale. In short, Prospero takes his inhabitants off course so that the primary enigma, which is textually centered, can possibly be glanced at. Of course, this is not possible, since the only thing which the masquerade succeeds in evoking is the 'mask' of this enigma, the mummer. But in the process of going 'off centre' by way of seclusion and eventual revelry, it does appear that Prospero and his courtiers, the latter perhaps unknowingly, are enacting a type of perverse idolatry in relation to the tale's actual centre—the Red Death—ostensibly more of a concept than a reality, unlike the 'blood as avatar.' This idolatry again re-emphasizes that the tale, according to Poe's set-up of the particular details, is a demonstration of the dangers which lurk in all dogma, in the sense that Prospero's endeavors are a type of religious 'ritualism' that has been extended into complete and futile perversion. The movement of the text indicates, in essence, that Prospero enacts a seclusion from the godhead (the Red Death) so that the ritual tribute of masquerade and costume can appear all the more real, as it does by way of the eventual 'sacrifice in blood.'

Levine, in his discussion of this tale as a musical form, appears to read a moral into the fol-

lowing phrase, thereby declaring that the sin of the nobles, in a purely religious context, rests in their having escaped like cowards from the ravages of the Red Death in the real world: "The external world could take care of itself" (Harrison 4:251). In this way, it is easy to make the next connection and say that the inherent selfishness of the nobles brings about the equally cruel conclusion of the tale. But with that type of a reading, which attempts to locate a sense of poetic justice in Poe's artistry, one is inevitably to come to the conclusion, as does Levine, that this tale is essentially a typical example of early 19th-century, magazine type, sensationalist fiction (203). According to my reading that the tale demonstrates the loopholes and dangers of dogmatic thinking, we can leave the sensationalism behind while we observe how each part of the text functions amid a larger, holistic unity of composition, which Poe had in mind while writing. That is why I believe that the following sentence in paragraph two is more significant, in relation to Prospero's machinations, than the evidence of mere escapism: "They resolved to leave means neither of ingress [n]or egress to the sudden impulses of despair or of frenzy from within" (Harrison 4:251). Prospero makes sure not to allow the courtiers to leave and return of their own 'free will'; in fact, the abbey is purposefully adorned with several means of entertainment so that no one thinks of leaving.

The earlier seclusion within the abbey, when now coupled with virtual imprisonment for the thousand courtiers, via the 'iron gates' that are 'welded' shut, smacks of sectarianism. In fact, what links religious fanaticism to a rigid sense of dogma also links it, as espoused by Prospero's own deviations in thought and decorum, to the 'occult' and Satanism (as embodied in the constant blood-imagery of the tale), and what links the prince to the occult and 'mysticism,' via the indirect worship of the Red Death through the masquerade, also links his endeavors, paradoxically though, to 'social realism' by way of his negation of the 'free will' of the courtiers. They are only free in as much as they partake of the indulgences that Prospero's own mind has provided them with. Hence, his seclusion still keeps dogma alive, and furthermore invigorates it since he is now the sole heir to the enigma of the Red Death, as embodied in the external world; he is now both priest and demi-god, in his synthetic abbey. That is why I earlier referred to Prospero's developments as being a 'fanaticism turned social realism and then reality' because his initial eccentricity

becomes actual reality within the secluded space that he has created for his courtiers, in the castellated abbey.

And if any suspicion should arise which questions the basis of Prospero's 'reality,' that too is to be effectively thwarted by way of the welded gates and more significantly through self-indulgence on the part of the nobles: "The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure. There were buffoons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet-dancers, there were musicians, there was Beauty, there was wine. All these and security were within. Without was the 'Red Death'" (4:251). When the narrator speaks that "security" was "within," he is speaking as the courtiers would have thought, and not as someone who is aware of the eventual, grim turn of events—this is a bit of black humor on Poe's part. More importantly, the second paragraph sets up the rules of Prospero's domain, namely, that no one is to be 'allowed the opportunity' to question his sanity.

The third paragraph is transitional, at best. It informs us that a "masked ball" is held in order to entertain the thousand courtiers "toward the close of the fifth or sixth month of...seclusion..." (4:251). The only aspect of the paragraph worth mentioning is that the narrator distinctly states that the masquerade was held either at the termination of "the fifth *or* sixth month"; there is an ambiguity in the temporal setting of the tale at this point, for the revelry occurs at the end of the month, but we do not know which one precisely. It is 'either' of the two, and supposedly, if we keep in mind Poe's type of craftsmanship, minute details such as this should not be thought of too seriously. However, the "totality of effect" to which Poe alludes in his thoughts on writing (most notably in "The Philosophy of Composition"), requires as well that every detail work towards an overall meaning; therefore, while the main result of the narrator's inability to define when exactly the masquerade occurs is the structuring of a 'gloomy' atmosphere, the secondary, underlying result is that the reader is indirectly being fed (in this transitional paragraph) the fact that something more ominous is to be 'revealed' by the revelry. The narrator hesitates (is unwilling rather than unable to expose in which 'exact' month the masquerade occurs) since its substantial effect, its being a wild revel, overrides its mere grounding in temporality (its mere existence). In short, its final degeneration (as encapsulated in Prospero's initial, suspicious intentions) interweaves 'moral

dissolution' into the greater aesthetic design of the narrative. In that way, Levine's dissatisfaction with this tale's overall effect is perhaps accounted for, since he incorrectly assumes that Poe has inscribed "common notions of morality" into the tale "to justify sensationalism" (200). In contrast, the sensationalism that is 'eventually' brought about by the masquerade demonstrates that because 'moral' downfall is enwrapped within it, the text is indeed concerned with its own relationship, as an artistic piece, with 'notions of morality.' Put bluntly, one must first 'evoke' something in order to disagree with it. In this case, Poe evokes a dogmatic and perverse masquerade in order to eventually negate it by way of the nihilatory dénouement.

Paragraph four brings in, for the first time, an account of the odd architectural setting in which the revel is held. We learn that this is an "imperial suite" of seven rooms, but that the layout is in no way linear: "The apartments were so irregularly disposed that the vision embraced but little more than one at a time" (Harrison 4:251). We further learn that the lighting of each chamber corresponds with the furnishings, and that the color pattern, of each room successively, is based on a type of rainbow arrangement—blue, purple, green, orange, white, violet, and black. If we keep in mind Prospero's need to keep the courtiers imbedded within his own aesthetic-architectural diversions, in order that they do not chance to question the validity of his design, via the issue of 'morality in art,' then it is most appropriate that he has created both an irregularity in the arrangement of the rooms and a fluidity in the color-coding. The arrangement of the rooms enables the revellers to observe "little more than one at a time"; in other words, Poe has interjected with this phrase that this particular imperial suite makes it visually impossible to observe the interior with one total observation of the decor, since only by being in a particular room can one effectively observe it in its entirety. Thus, in order that a "totality of impression" (as Poe says) is to arise regarding the suite, each room must be traversed in sequence.

Hence, the courtiers, by way of Prospero's set-up of the architecture, are compelled to visit the various rooms often enough to 'relax their curiosity' in regard to the unknown; that is why "little more" than one room can be observed at a time, the particular room in which the courtier is presently situated, and perhaps the rudimental evidence (such as an opening which allows for a

vague glance into the next apartment) that again heightens the interest of the courtier so that the constant movement of the revellers remains unimpeded. This fluidity of form is thus complemented by Prospero's color-coding of the rooms, so that a constant anticipation is maintained, both on the part of the revellers and the reader, as to 'what shall happen next.' This anticipation on the part of the revellers also serves to keep them at bay, continuously subjected to the awe which Prospero's talent in design inspires, so that his role as a type of 'off centre' priest-figure is maintained, due to his "love of the *bizarre*" (4:251). What the overlap of architecture and colorization again emphasizes is that, as I have suggested earlier, the masquerade that Prospero sets up enacts a type of ultra-dogmatic and 'occult,' by way of his eccentricity, ritualization that indirectly commemorates the 'centered' godhead of this text (the Red Death) which in fact is the source of its thematic existence, whereby Poe as author and constructor has inscribed the process of literary composition within Prospero's own behavior. As does the prince, so too does the literary artist think up a theme, whereupon the theme is developed by being discussed from the perspective of distance. In short, the theme, after being thought up, is then circumlocuted by its composer so that an authenticity of meaning is built up within narrative composition. Not all fiction is written this way; but indeed, it is how Poe composed, and he exposes that method of composition by having Prospero 'talk around' the theme (the Red Death), whereby it becomes an enigma, as mentioned earlier, that envelops the entire narrative in the mechanics of its own discourse.

Hence, Prospero appears both dogmatic and *bizarre* (as Poe says), because, by paralleling the mechanics of Poe's type of writing, he becomes a thematic priest-figure, who follows and in fact worships his own machinations. (Some people may be reminded of Shakespeare's Prospero with his magical powers in this context, but Poe would probably replace the word 'magic' with 'illusion,' in the sense that there is no such thing as real, successful magic, and hence, it is not surprising that his Prospero fails, being more ironic than Shakespearian, "Prospero" yet not prosperous.) It is perhaps because of this priestly attitude on the part of the prince, that the architecture and colorization of the seven rooms are structured so that the continuous passage of the thousand courtiers through them becomes a 'ritual' form of worship, a paying of tribute (whether they like it

or not) to the concrete results of the prince's endeavors at seclusion. The fact of the matter is that this circular worship, the passage through the rooms by the revellers, always brings them in closer proximity of the 'black room' which is the symbolic 'altar' of this castellated abbey; in that same process of passing the altar is foreshadowed the grim ending, for only in this room, the most important and vital one, in relation to Prospero's creation, is there a serious flaw in the decor, and only in this room "the color of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations" (4:252). This discrepancy in decor of the altar room of this masquerade, thereby re-emphasizes within the text that Prospero's exercise in dogma (his faith in imagination) has brought the entire ritual of seclusion and revelry 'off centre,' so that the concept of the Red Death, since now made an enigma by way of 'distance and awe,' is to forever remain an enigma to these secluded courtiers. In simpler terms, the discrepancy in the decor signifies that Prospero is a false prophet, and more importantly, that all prophets are 'false,' since the *only* discrepancy in decor, of the entire castellated abbey, rests precisely in the 'altar' room.

Poe has thus exposed, via decorative flaw, that there is no magic in striking up a concept and then making of it an enigma (the Red Death in this case). The fact that this flaw in decor happens to be 'red as blood,' links it inherently to the symbol of 'blood as avatar' which occurred in the introduction to the tale; hence, the avatar is also flawed, according to the logic of its expression. This black room with its discrepancy shall cause the 'death' of the masquerade eventually by way of the spilling of blood of the courtiers, and so Poe again demonstrates that Prospero's downfall is linked to this 'minute' imperfection in architectural embellishment. By grounding the concept of the enigmatic Red Death in the secluded abbey, through the humanly-recognizable avatar 'of blood,' by way of the red windowpanes in the black room, Prospero has enacted an error which is the focal point of this narrative, namely, he has believed rather than simply 'entertained' ideas and is thus to become a victim of his own overindulgent imagination. More importantly, the thousand courtiers are to suffer too the consequences of the prince's own endeavors as the leader and organizer of these festivities, but there is no room for complaints in this totalitarian-sectarian network of existence, even though some of the revellers may indeed prefer to remain independent of

the prince's 'type' of reality, and so we read of some hesitancy in relation to the pervading spirit of the altar-room: "But in the western or black chamber the effect of the fire-light that streamed upon the dark hangings through the blood-tinted panes, was ghastly in the extreme, and produced so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered, that there were few of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all" (4:252). The prince's exploits in what is basically a form of conceptual demagogy makes of him a totalitarian figure, whereby the excessive 'faith-as-fanaticism' of the followers who ritualize Prospero's exploits via the masquerade is transformed paradoxically, as mentioned earlier, into a reigning 'social realism' and hence 'reality' because the prince's castellation of the courtiers into his own realm excludes all other possibilities of discourse, thereby making of his imagination a complete and total reality. (This 'reality' is not a mere social reality *per se* but a reality that supports and revolves around an ideological grain, Prospero's imagination, as I said earlier, and hence, I have used the phrase 'social realism' to attempt describing this grey area of the prince's masquerade, where ideology and reality intermingle and interweave.) In that way, Poe's bonding of faith, dogma, and totalitarian reality not only structures and leads up to the devastating conclusion, but also inscribes a type of Stalinesque atmosphere within the text: the Red Death is thus a most appropriate enigma for the tale to revolve around. Either way, whether we describe this enigma as Stalinesque or not, it cannot be denied that the tale posits a creative/aesthetic enigma as both its theme and source. Furthermore, there can be nothing more antagonistic to the creativity of the literary artist (in this case Poe) than a type of 'social realism' that forces art to have a higher goal than its own vitality, namely, that of the state. As such, Poe counter-attacks the assertion that his art 'lacks morality' by subtly demonstrating, through Prospero's exploitation of art, that it is an 'immoral' gesture to approve only *one* type of art—essentially, that of the approver.

Paragraph five re-emphasizes that Prospero's endeavors are grounded in the realm of temporality, in contrast to the enigmatic and timeless 'concept' of the Red Death, that exists outside the abbey. The black room is thus not only the altar room to this central point in the text, but is also an area, or rather, *the* point at which fantasy commingles with reality by way of the 'flaw' in

decor of the mismatched windows, and more importantly, because "there stood against the western wall, a gigantic clock of ebony" (4:252). This time-piece in turn exposes that Prospero's imaginative synthesis of the 'internal' reality of the abbey (the masquerade) is bound to terminate, at one point or another (its 'clanging' is more that of the scythe of time than of a mere pendular clock); in more compact terms, Prospero's reality is compelled to return eventually to the state in which it originated—imagination—and hence, nothingness in regard to textuality, since the 'unwritten' piece of work does not exist (I am positing such an analogy to imply that Poe is speaking as a constructor-theorist within the story). On a more thematic note, it becomes evident that the 'monotonous clanging' of the ebony clock constantly reiterates, to the courtiers, that this revelry is subject to the vitality of Prospero's intellectual-imaginative powers. Thus, when he dies, so too does the surrounding decor. More importantly, the ominous atmosphere that is set up by the narrator regarding this clock signals that the prince's overall intentions, as a type of priest-figure, are still suspicious, since the presence of the time-piece is another flaw in decor (as are the red windowpanes); his grandiose synthesis of a 'secluded' reality was not free of error in the first place, because it is subject to contamination and change due to the presence of external factors. In that way, the clock, like the earlier 'avatar of blood,' is another symbol (and indication) that the conceptual enigma of the Red Death has been inscribed into this revelry, by way of the prince being eccentric and 'off centre' in his approach to avoiding the pestilence. Instead of keeping it in view while constructing a secluded environment for the courtiers (so that he can make sure of its exclusion) he turns a blind eye to it, thereby unknowingly incorporating it into his creation.

I say 'unknowingly,' because that is how it appears to the courtiers who revel and are then abruptly introduced to the grim dénouement: this is not to say that Prospero is not responsible for the conclusion, because in fact, this happy masquerade, via the black room and the 'redness' of the panes, commemorates and praises this main enigma (the Red Death) for allowing the revellers (by way of Prospero's craftsmanship) to remain immune to its full wrath—for now at least. The Red Death thus appears to resemble some type of god-figure (a 'total' structure), in its 'relation' to those who revel under its shadow. In that way, the prince's own exercises in creation and subse-

quent glorification of imaginative-creative dogma only serve to 'puff up' and make more enigmatic an already abstract and 'central' figure to the text. Poe is again here, by introducing an ebony clock to an already 'awe-inspiring' room, equating dangerous behavior with a blind and non-analytical adherence to principles; Prospero's rigidity in construction (albeit an original one in the typical sense of the word) excludes the possibility of 'free choice' for the revellers—they are here, they are partaking in the authoritative figure's folly, and paradoxically they now wish to be constantly imbued in the entertainment that the masquerade provides, so as not to be reminded of the possible invalidity of the prince's 'principles of design.' The tale has now been fully imbued in the workings of 'social realism,' via the interjection of the clock, because this is no longer a spontaneous, aesthetic masquerade but a state-ordained one that 'keeps time' to the ebony clock, and ultimately, to Prospero's rule of law: "But when the echoes had fully ceased, a light laughter at once pervaded the assembly; the musicians looked at each other and smiled as if at their own nervousness and folly, and made whispering vows, each to the other, that the next chiming of the clock should produce in them no similar emotion; and then, after the lapse of sixty minutes...there came yet another chiming of the clock, and then were the same disconcert and tremulousness and meditation as before" (4:253). It is because of this 'keeping time' that the masquerade quickly becomes stale, and in fact the narrative comes to mimic (by way of periodically emphasizing the contrast between the clock's chiming and the revelry) this repetition thematically. Hence, 'variety' of thought is replaced by conceptual stagnancy through the repetitive quality of Prospero's masquerade (that now embodies within itself the Stalinesque 'consistency' of social realism, and the latter concept's subordination of artistic vitality). And of course, this subordination of aesthetics is antithetical to the literary artist's survival on 'originality in conceptual development,' that is to say, real originality, not the generic "originality" of thematics (such as Prospero's) that is not developed but repeated (the masquerade's 'keeping time') and which Poe objected to in his critical comments on composition. I admit once again, though, that some people may accuse me of inappropriately comparing 'social realism' to Prospero's masquerade, in the sense that the masquerade espouses 'decadence' as opposed to social realism. True enough, but decadence *per se*,

when brought in as a totalizing force (as in Prospero's realm) becomes 'socially real'—and hence, it becomes an implicit social(ist) realism. Decadence requires strong, constant individualization which maintains social 'fragmentation,' a fragmentation which is not present here because of the masquerade's totality within Prospero's milieu. In this context, social(ist) realism consistently opposes 'decadence' by forcing itself onto an environment *en masse*, so as not to be labelled 'decadent' itself, which it inevitably is because it exists as an 'imposing' ideology—a 'sociable' imposter like Prospero—not a mere, non-ideological reality *per se*.

The sixth paragraph returns the reader's focus again from the peculiarity of decor to the prince himself. What essentially occurs here is that Prospero's ability as an artist, albeit a flawed one in regard to construction, is spoken of. Therefore, the discrepancy between the clock and the revel, in the previous episode, is left behind for a moment: "But, in spite of these things, it was a gay and magnificent revel" (4:253). Indeed, if we look at the masquerade without relating its presence to the machinations of Prospero and to the imperfect decor which surrounds it, then it is entirely possible to label it "gay and magnificent" on the surface. Even with this paragraph's emphasis on the prince's "fine eye" for design, the phrasing still does not allow for the reader's suspicion to rest. We read how his plans "glowed with barbaric lustre," and most significantly, of how he remains a questionable character: "There are some who would have thought him mad. His followers felt that he was not. It was necessary to hear and see and touch him to be *sure* that he was not" (4:253). It is quite evident that "some" would think him mad, primarily those extraneous to the text (the critic, the author, et cetera). However, even the emphasis on how the "followers felt that he was not" does not negate the sense that they are 'hesitant' in regard to his set-up of the revel, as indicated in my previous discussion; the logical explanation of why the word "felt" is present here is that while the revellers *feel* that Prospero is a stable individual, this does not necessarily exclude the possibility that they 'think' that he is not. In short, they let their emotions guide them instead of their analytical powers (which subsequently give rise to an undercurrent of 'doubt,' as Poe has effectively inscribed in the tale by way of "tremulousness and meditation" on each chiming of the hour). And the italicization of the word "sure" in the last sentence of the para-

graph indicates, if anything, that the narrator is emphasizing the gullibility of the courtiers and Poe is underlining the need for an 'uncertainty of belief' on the part of the reader in relation to Prospero.

Paragraph seven then shifts the attention of the reader from both the decor of the apartments, as in paragraphs four and five, and from the prince himself, as in paragraph six, and we subsequently find ourselves engaged in an analysis of the revellers themselves. We read of how the prince's own "guiding taste" has clothed the revellers: "Be sure they were grotesque. There were much glare and glitter and piquancy and phantasm—much of what has been since seen in 'Hernani'" (4:254). In that way, we know that the courtiers are dressed up to satisfy the prince's own oddity of design (we already know that he turns his imaginative fervor into 'social realism,' so as to make complete his status as a demi-god within the secluded abbey). The new effect which here arises is that the narrator partakes in the process of 'historicizing' (making valid) Prospero's status as an artist who is thematically original, and not 'conceptually' (Poe, as I have indicated, supports the latter, which is not generic, that is to say, common, reproducible, and marketable). Therefore, he speaks of how the prince's endeavors are similar in constitution, thematically, to Hugo's "Hernani" of 1829. What this interjection does is to make Prospero's particular revel less suspicious, simply by placing it amid the continuum of literary history and development. As such, the name of a prominent play (in this case "Hernani") is evoked to make it appear, within Poe's tale, that Prospero is not that 'mad' at all, since he works now with a factual and thematic basis in mind, namely, that of Hugo's play. Whether the similarities between Prospero's endeavors and those of the characters in "Hernani" are numerous or not is of little concern to us in outlining this tale's process of resolution. (While the reference to "Hernani" may possibly be 'conceptually false,' it is still 'textually real' since imbedded in the narrative, and this latter 'truth' holds sway over us because we first read the tale as a composition before looking for the potential fictitiousness of this textual truth in external sources, sources which may invalidate the "Hernani" reference as inappropriate but can never erase it from the primary text itself.) Poe places this historical reference in the tale mainly to give Prospero a type of solidity in the text that he had not experienced hereto-

fore (and of course, to emphasize the theatricality of Prospero's revel), and this is precisely necessary in order that the soon-to-come twist of events (of the mummer's entrance) is structurally effective amid the text as a whole. When Prospero eventually falls, he will thus 'appear' to fall from a higher level (via the previous invocation of "Hernani"), even though he is less substantial than this, being Stalinesque and ultra-dogmatic (to name his most prominent characteristics).

Hence, the remainder of the paragraph focuses on the appearance of the courtiers themselves, so as to make it evident that they have indeed become 'less substantial' during the course of this repetitive masquerade: "To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams. And these—the dreams—writhed in and about, taking hue from the rooms, and causing the wild music of the orchestra to seem as the echo of their steps" (4:254). It is not by chance that the revellers are now described as being "dreams," since they lack personality at this point; they are merely the instruments which Prospero keeps intact so that this 'revel of tribute' (to himself and subsequently to the Red Death *as* social realism) can continue unimpeded. It is thus not at all odd that, as a consequence of the masquerade's increasing frenzy, fewer and fewer people enter the black chamber, which is in fact the tributary focus of this revel, since it stands as the architectural symbol of Prospero's ideology and imagination. As the time approaches midnight, "there comes from the near clock of ebony a muffled peal more solemnly emphatic than any which reaches *their* ears who indulge in the more remote gaieties of the other apartments" (4:254-5).

The chimes of the clock increase in 'solemnity' as they are repeated throughout the narrative, for they shatter periodically the manipulatory dreaminess which Prospero has set up with this frenzied masquerade, and subsequently, they intermittently remind those few revellers who do step into the black chamber that this is not a 'real' reality which they inhabit. Critics such as Blair might disagree with my last comment that this is not a 'real' reality, for he states that, regarding the color-coding, the "colors of the seven chambers in the 'Masque' suggest...the allegorical signification of the seven ages of man who progresses 'from the blue of the dawn of life to the black of its night'" (Fagin 216). The colors, in keeping with the greater structure of the tale, seem more to suggest a 'repetitive intoxication' (a hypnosis of sorts, provided by the prince), especially

when the hallucinatory effect of the 'wild and flickering' lighting of the rooms combines with the 'waltzing' of the revellers, that is rotational and thus further destabilizing. This growing destabilization is precisely why the chimes of the clock are more "emphatic than any which reaches *their* ears," that is, of those who are revelling outside of the black chamber: Poe does not italicize carelessly, and the word "their" is a case in point. As the masquerade becomes more repetitive, frenzied, and thus hypnotic, the number of those who are still sensible and suspicious of Prospero is dropping, since the black room is being increasingly bypassed for the "more remote gaieties" of the remaining chambers. And so, when the mummer finally arrives, he shall take up the position of *antagonist* in this text, because in all but a few of the revellers' eyes, Prospero is no longer eccentric, suspicious, and 'off centre.'

The eighth paragraph does not indulge in the hallucinatory atmosphere of the masquerade itself, but instead, it appears to delve deeper into the particular 'hesitancy' of some of the revellers, an effect which I had referred to earlier on. In fact, this section brings the time to 'midnight' at Prospero's ball. Again, the waltzing and music cease as the ebony clock sounds out twelve chimes, and during this interval in the revelry "it happened, perhaps, that more of thought crept, with more of time, into the meditations of the thoughtful among those who revelled" (Harrison 4:255). This phrase emphasizes how "more" "thought" was exercised by those revellers who were already 'meditative and thoughtful'; in short, the revellers who 'think more' as the clock strikes twelve are those exact same "few" who earlier dared to venture into the black room, despite the gloominess. In that way, it can be said that these particular revellers, the more meditative ones, are the first "to become aware of the presence of a masked figure..." (4:255). And so, their awareness of this "presence" eventually spreads to the less astute revellers who were more intoxicated with the frenzied masquerade, in the form of a "rumor" that spreads "whisperingly around." However, owing to the fact that textual reality oftentimes defies practical explanation, it can further be interpreted that the overwhelming doubts of the most élitist of revellers in regard to the prince's intentions, which become concentrated at the sounding of midnight, essentially crystallize this masked presence within the abbey: in more symbolic terms, the few who do 'think' have now become fully

aware of the hypocritical stance of the prince—he is both the 'state' and an artist (since he has created the revel), and therefore, ultimately, he is a partial and 'transient' aesthete. Granted, it is too late for the more 'thoughtful' revellers to save themselves (as we are about to read), but at least they save face in their subsequent downfall by having subtly 'unmasked' Prospero's character at this point (of the clock's sounding midnight).

Paragraph nine focuses on the constitution of this mummer who has apparently spoiled the masquerade. His inappropriateness is immediately pinpointed, for he "had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death" (4:256). What this figure has essentially done, in regard to the grandiose religious manner by which Prospero has given tribute to his creativity, via the altar-black room, is committed the act of sacrilege. His 'mask' and 'stiffened' countenance are basically a parody of the dogmatic austerity of the prince, that the black chamber was constructed to commemorate. This is precisely why, to Prospero, "there are matters of which no jest can be made" (4:256). In truth, to imitate the prince's achievements satirically as an eccentric personality, is to question his position as a 'serious' individual; this is exactly what the figure of the mummer does. The figure reaffirms Prospero's 'off centeredness' in relation to the text's centered theme of the Red Death, the prince's own enigma of demagogy, which was effectively circumlocuted by him, through the masquerade, until the appearance of this rival who introduces, finally, a real, varied reality to this secluded realm which in turn negates the prince's own self-propagandizing attempts at 'unitarian' reality, by way of his patronizing the revellers (via seclusion and supposed immunity to the external plague), and their subsequent indulgence in his own artform (the odd masquerade within a bizarre imperial suite).

Paragraphs ten through twelve are transitional, consisting of minor narrative decor which brings us to the final conflict between the prince and the new, masked presence. The tenth paragraph again re-emphasizes Prospero's dogmatic and totalitarian concepts: the narrator interjects the phrase as to how the new figure walked in a stalking manner "as if more fully to sustain its *rôle*..." (4:256). The significance here is that, unlike the revellers who had previously acted as instruments for sustaining the prince's masquerade, this mummer precisely, as Poe italicizes, ful-

fills his own "role." This self-fulfillment is however unsatisfactory to Prospero, who, in keeping with his views, does not allow for independent, unpatronized roles and artforms (save his own), and so, in appropriate fashion, "his brow reddened with rage" (4:256). The use of the word "reddened" again nicely reiterates the prince's connection with the primary enigma of the narrative, namely, the Red Death, via the flawed decor of red and black in the commemorative-altar room. Paragraph eleven is the only one where Prospero himself speaks, and it serves to make evident his position as a suspicious and Stalinesque aesthete: "Seize him and unmask him—that we may know whom we have to hang at sunrise, from the battlements" (4:256)! The twelfth paragraph continues with this tone, and in fact, the prince ends up looking most un-artistic and totalitarian. We learn once again that everything is under his control, since the music becomes "hushed at the waving of his hand" (4:256). More importantly, his previously bizarre taste in decor is now exposed as simply being vulgar and tasteless, since he is described in unregal and peasant-like terms, being both "bold and robust."

Paragraph thirteen is centered around the actual conflict between Prospero and the intruder. What stands out most therefore is the point at which the prince falls dead. However, the entire procession of this unusual section is of particular significance, in relation to the prince's defeat. We read of how, at the opening of the paragraph, Prospero stands in the "blue room" where in fact he first spotted this new presence; as the narrative continues, he gradually makes his way into the black-red chamber where the murder occurs. In that way, by proceeding in his final moments from 'blue to black and red,' within the color-continuum of the imperial suite, the prince is enacting 'and finally revealing' within the text an ideological transformation: the realm of blue-'regality' and hence patronized art is being replaced by pure state-art and ostensibly 'non-art.' I have already said 'patronized' a few times earlier; while the masquerade is intact and functioning, and hence 'paying tribute' symbolically to Prospero's artistic taste, he is simultaneously a 'patron' of this particular scene (since it could not have occurred without his endeavors). Therefore, his patronizing role bonds his artistic production (the masquerade) to the state, since he in fact stands as 'prince' of his dominion.

Paragraph thirteen, in relation to Prospero's duplicitous relationship with his milieu, appears structurally to re-emphasize his position as both 'prince and aesthetician'; as such, we have a journey from blue to black occurring in this section (in fact, it occurs throughout the narrative but is here being made textually concrete by way of Poe's emphasis on the color-coding), because the final result of Prospero's occupation as 'patron of the arts' is the realization of pure state-art, the final transformation into 'social realism,' whereby Prospero's role as an 'interlocutor' between artistic vitality and its purpose is no longer necessary, since art is now *the* state directly, and not merely *of it*, by way of Prospero's transitional role as a patron. This interlocutory position of Prospero is why the masquerade only functioned temporarily—in the act of being patronized by the prince—and so it was only in that relationship vital, albeit in an enfeebled sort of way, because the revelry (the aesthetic vitality) was still invoking Prospero and subsequently 'the state.'

Indeed, this particular structuring of Prospero's role on my part may seem odd itself, particularly if we look upon regality (via the prince himself) as being antithetical to the artistic theory of 'social realism' (as espoused in communism, which is theoretically opposed to monarchism), but the set-up of these two antagonistic realities is in fact equivalent. Just as Prospero is a patron of his own imagination (by way of the masquerade), so too is an anti-regal leader a patron of his own tastes (by way of encouragement of 'state art'): the only difference is that Prospero finally pays tribute to his own dogma of 'social realism' by making it complete and non-individualistic, while someone like Stalin prefers to symbolize his own production simultaneously, without being caught up in the act of 'paying tribute.' These complexities of relation are ingrained effectively within Poe's tale, for, as a critic, he found himself opposed to the patronized and cheap sensationalism of his own literary market (whereby he distinctly stated that his terror was 'of the soul' and not 'of Germany'), and as a writer, he was simultaneously aware that this same magazinist reality would still allow for the individual to speak (albeit in an insinuated fashion): 'social realism,' in Poe's theories, was thus the greater of two evils.

And in fact, the paragraph in which Prospero meets his demise demonstrates this theorization. As the masked presence (the mummer) approaches the prince, the full realization of state-

subordinated aestheticism is about to take place, that will negate even Prospero's semi-individualistic magazinism; in an instant, upon the prince's murder, sensationalism will have therefore been replaced by total horror. The mechanics of the paragraph enact this shift from mere sensation to horror, and it is significant here to note again Prospero's duplicitous relationship with this emerging mummer. I have chosen the term 'duplicitous' precisely because of the prince's earlier ambiguity in relation to the primary enigma of the text, namely, the Red Death itself: he had circumlocuted the thematic 'centre' of the tale in order to pay indirect tribute to it via his own indulgence in bizarre themes (of the masquerade and unusual imperial suite). Presently, he comes into direct contact with an even more concrete representation of the primary enigma than the black-red-altar room itself—a masked impersonator—and this impersonator, via the prince's own peculiar relationship with the enigma, possesses the pseudo-identical traits of behavior that Prospero himself displays; I have said 'pseudo'-identical, for the imposter, by way of his being a focal point in the suite, satirizes the prince's validity as 'ruler and patron' of the events at hand. Therefore, owing to the structural similarity between the two, we read the following: "But from a certain nameless awe with which the mad assumptions of the mummer had inspired the whole party, there were found none who put forth hand to seize him..." (4:257).

This is the same 'nameless awe' that had secured the prince's position earlier, as a *not* mad individual, on the part of the revellers. And this mimicry continues, because the courtiers 'shrink away' from this imposter as he passes along, with the same terror and hesitation that they displayed in relation to the black-altar room; in essence, it appears as if they are, with this 'shrinking away,' still paying tribute to the imaginative powers of the prince himself, as if this mummer is the prince's own product and responsibility—which he is. The imposter certainly is effective in building up Prospero's fatal rage, for he moved with a "solemn and measured step...through the blue chamber to the purple—through the purple to the green—through the green to the orange—through this again to the white—and even thence to the violet, ere a decided movement had been made to arrest him" (4:257). In that way, this figure makes the rounds of the masquerade itself, so as to mock the inherent mechanics of Prospero's personalized artform. Unable to stand this, Pros-

pero challenges the imposter, only to be negated out of the text entirely. More precisely, the prince is absorbed by his own excessive patronage of the masquerade; the revelry becomes so grandiose and eccentric that Prospero, now having made of his imagination something concrete, becomes a part of the now reigning 'social reality' that has no need of patronage, since it 'funds itself,' so to speak. It is thus fitting, in relation to this demise of art (even if a partial one), that the imposter's garments are found to be "untenanted by any tangible form," since the social mass lacks personality, especially now that the prince's individualism is no longer sustaining the revelry.

The conclusion of the tale brings in the enigma which had been indirectly commemorated, by way of Prospero's particulars of design (the black-red room), for the duration of the revelry. We now read of the actual presence of the tale's thematic 'centre,' and not of imposters and demagogues (the masked individual and the prince, respectively): "And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death" (4:258). This "presence" is now finally here, and subsequently, it has become a 'reality,' and a 'social' one in particular, because it affects all of the courtiers. Now, one might argue that my last remarks on how Prospero succumbs to his fully materialized imagination are not congruent with the actual conclusion, since the revellers also die, thereby negating the masquerade (the prince's imaginative product). In fact, all that has been negated is Prospero's type of patronized art, and naturally enough, this occurs because the patron himself has ceased to exist. However, the ideological doctrine of the prince, which had allowed for this patronized art to flourish temporarily and which was commemorated via that same semi-art, is still intact. To be blunt, it is now the only thing left and is thus self-commemorating. There is thus no longer any possible need for the revellers, since they were merely necessary for Prospero to put his thoughts on state-ordained art 'into action.' Once these ideas became a reality, as signalled by the intrusion of the mummer, the mechanism which constituted the gradual process of attainment was subsumed by the end result, whose potential realization was in the same instance the primary invocation of this process (demonstrating Poe's technique of compact composition): I have referred to it as being the 'primary and centred enigma' of this tale quite often, for its revelation is always murderous to the process (to Prospero and his transient masquerade)—and so, the Red Death now holds "illimitable

dominion over all" (4:258).

In short, the enigmatic position which the Red Death holds in the text is a result of the fact that the realization of 'social realism' results in creative-aesthetic stasis, because the 'state as art' negates the need for art, and replaces it with patriotic-Stalinesque imitation and so accounts for the eventual introduction of the 'imposter' figure, who arises as a type of statue commemorating the supreme-leader (Prospero), in a mocking sort-of-way of course, since the narrator, and especially Poe, find themselves unaltered by the dogma and near-fanatical ritualism which has occurred here. In more theoretical terms, Prospero's death lets the 'signified' stand without its 'signifier' (the state without its leader as a 'patron of its evocation'). Poe, via the narrator's intactness throughout (even though all of the courtiers die), prefers to stand as a symbol without its 'referent,' which is the embodiment of the principle of 'art for art's sake.' In fact, the mocking attitude which the imposter exemplified in relation to Prospero's patronized art, by traversing all of the rooms in a pompous fashion and by dressing up as the Red Death so as to satirize 'social realism,' may be the sign of something more unique. This may be one of the rare tales in which Poe indeed speaks via the narrator. I have said the 'narrator,' since he is the only one who escapes the castellated abbey alive, even though he was there all along and, according to the tale's discourse, "previously unnoticed." The narrator could quite possibly be, and in fact, he could have only survived the revelry by being "the mummer." This is not to say that the narrator has any relation with the Red Death itself, since he merely masquerades as it and escapes before the real 'social realism' sets in. As such, his garments are found "untenanted by any tangible form," since he lets the symbol stand without its referent in the act of 'leaving the premises.' He has thus exemplified 'art for art's sake' by ridiculing patronage and leaving before the atmosphere becomes too politically real and stagnant.

Some critics may ridicule my equating of the narrator with the mummer as being over-indulgent. However, this possibility is in no way ruled out by the tale's structure. More so, this type of a reading effectively allows us to juxtapose Poe's own artistic theories with those of this 'fictional' character, Prospero, so that this particular tale becomes a demonstration of how dog-

matic artists (in this case a prince who 'believes rather than entertains ideas') are in danger of producing art which lacks aesthetic vitality, since it *also* supports something other than itself (in this case Prospero's self-image as a good leader), or even worse, art which *only* supports something other than itself. Both cases, of patronized and state art, overlap, and, most significantly, the more moderate version of this doctrinaire thinking (which excludes conceptual originality), if left in unstable hands (the eccentric Prospero), is doomed to decay into the latter, more rigid form (which further excludes generic, thematic originality). By stating that the narrator is also the imposter at the prince's masquerade, I may also be accused of playing the part of 'Dupin as critic,' but let it be said that since the tale's composition (1842) coincides with Poe's first triumphs in the ratiocinative field, the element of detection is thus, as if by Poe's own developments of the Dupin tales, thrust in a more subtle fashion into "The Masque of the Red Death."

More precisely, the final effect of all this may be more 'intertextual' than ratiocinative, since there are similarities in composition and technique with other tales by Poe (such as "King Pest"), but it is still logical enough to state that the mummer had earlier eluded the suspicion of Prospero (since he too was successfully walled into the abbey by way of the prince's flaws in design). And thus, the narrator-imposter warns the crowd of the impending doom which awaits Prospero's semi-creative environment, namely, the full negation of artistry (even of this transient, patronized form), and he tells us (the readers) what indeed occurs. If we take into account that the mummer found himself in the prince's abbey-dominion by way of a 'flaw' in design, then it is equally appropriate (and in keeping with Poe's unity of composition), that he leaves by way of a similar, if not the same, flaw. Put simply, Prospero's error in design could have been so rudimental that the imposter leaves the premises through a hidden back-door, quite nicely concealed by that ebony clock which most of the courtiers stay away from. For evidence of this, we need look no further than the conclusion, in which Poe distinctly states that "he" (referring more probably to the imposter than to the non-gendered Red Death itself (while this is difficult to prove it is even more difficult to disprove)) "had come like a thief in the night" (4:258). The narrator's brief masquerading as the 'personification' of Prospero's ideology was enough to bring the latter 'over the edge.'

More so, being the avid and pedantic critic who he was, Poe could not resist, via this narrator-imposter (who is theoretically less of an imposter than Prospero because it is he who sustains the narrative), to bring down the prince, in front of his followers, as being the 'false' aesthetician who he is, since his functioning as both 'artist and statesman' makes him duplicitous within the text and demonstrates his 'gradual implementation' of 'social realism.' Perhaps it is because of all which I have said regarding this tale's structure that V. F. Odoevsky, a Russian-Romantic writer and critic who demonstrated in his tales the convoluted and at times antagonistic relationship between art and society, said before his death in the late 1860s, perhaps after perusing Dostoevsky's first translation of a group of Poe's tales into Russian (1866) and noting the similarities, that he wrote "in the manner of E. A. Poe rather than of Hoffmann" (Terras 314).

(2) Negating the Holistics

While interpretation of the Poe tale allows for stable and structured readings, owing to the 'multi-fluency' of the symbolism, it is that same openness of the symbolic tapestry which in turn can become the subject of scrutiny. This latter phenomenon has been demonstrated well by deconstruction, which as a method of close reading goes beyond the surface of the narrative and looks into the building blocks, the symbols which, in this case, Poe has employed. Most notably, critics such as Lacan and Derrida have said much on "The Purloined Letter," and on how it is perhaps an error on the reader's part to take Poe at 'face value' ("Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" and "Le Facteur de la Vérité," respectively). While in some cases effective, deconstructionist readings also risk labeling the openness of Poe's symbolism indirectly as a 'flaw.' In that way, Poe has been somewhat transformed in the past few decades into a poor Gothic writer, since the facade of Gothicism appears too improbable and excessive, and hence, it degenerates into a type of 'kitsch.' This concept of the "flawed Gothic" is effectively argued by G. R. Thompson in his discussion on the use of irony in Poe's works; however, he sidesteps the argument and emphasizes how this flaw is an effect of the narrator's ironic-duplicitous position within the narrative.

I am willing to venture further than this and will say that, instead of being a poor Gothic writer, Poe in fact is not a *particularly* Gothic writer; the flaw is read into the tales by way of 'deconstructing the openness' of the symbolism, whereby Poe's artistry appears to malfunction. While analyzing the tale's rudiments (the way in which Poe has set things up), the critic can easily succumb into viewing these rudiments as being the entire textual reality 'itself,' and so, by way of such an interpretation, the tale as a holistic organism is negated. It is precisely because of this susceptibility to 'inreading' that I have left the deconstructionist position in regard to "The Masque of the Red Death" for this separate chapter: put simply, a reading of the symbolic underlayer of a tale is only effective if taken 'in the context' of the tale's overall consistency. More importantly, this is a necessity if we are not to negate Poe's own theory of the "unity of effect." Had I initially set down a deconstructionist reading, in the first chapter, the error of the past few decades would have been

duplicated: I would have incorrectly assumed that a flaw is inherent in Poe's artistry. Furthermore, all of the cases of 'irony and tension' which deconstruction effectively reads into Poe's use of symbolic openness would have supported the original false claim, namely, that the "Red Death" tale is an unsuccessful attempt at Gothic art since the excessiveness of the entire facade makes it unbelievable and hence, ineffectual. Now that the deconstructionist reading is following a structured one (even though the methodology appears similar), the flaw which will arise out of the tale's symbolic inconsistencies is, retrospectively, indicative of symbolic openness. It is acceptable to read the Gothic as being a *part* of the tale's effect, but it is incorrect to assume that it should be the *only* effect. The irony in Poe's tales is indeed there, but, instead of indicating the lack of Gothic seriousness (which it does when taken out of context), it shows that Poe was well aware and therefore suggested that paradoxically, openness in narrative form (and hence the symbols themselves) can be misinterpreted.

Some critics might argue that the 'deconstructionist' reading which I hope to offer here is perhaps no different from the 'implicit structuralism' of the previous chapter. There is one major difference: instead of structuring a single, coherent interpretation, I will attempt to look at the textual ambiguities and nuances on which 'stable' interpretations, such as that in the first chapter, are founded. Put simply, it is an interpretive shift on my part from the signified to the signifier. This, at least, is a deconstructionist process. Granted, such a process is defined differently by various literary-critical manuals. Deconstruction, as an 'open-ended' framework, allows for 'various forms of itself' (extreme, conservative, and everything in between). Its inherent openness is best encapsulated in this statement by Flores: because there is no real strategy to deconstruction "we can never be certain in any particular instance whether [it] operates as a critique, whether there is a deconstructor (as agent) at work, or whether a deconstruction has been completed or has even taken place" (10). Keeping this in mind, I will now attempt to be a 'deconstructor.' The key word is *attempt*.

There is indeed an underlying layer of, for lack of a better term, 'uncanniness' in the "Red Death" tale. And this presence (also known as a 'sense of gloom' in its more generic form) appears

to radiate both from Prospero's character and the architectural surroundings which are his own product; taken a step further, this gloominess is immediately linked with the alien ornateness of the Gothic style when the reader peruses the particular set-up of the odd masquerade which Prospero holds. The reader makes this connection on a purely visual basis by connecting the odd atmosphere of the tale with the symbolic heaviness that resides behind it (in this way the symbolic tapestry is equated with Gothicism); the internal decor of Prospero's dominion appears thus to embody the Gothic style since it is itself a demonstration of that 'type of art.' However, when the symbolic 'heaviness' itself becomes a part of the analysis, it is exposed as being ineffective in sustaining the Gothic type of art; the laying down of particulars by Poe in this text appears not to have had as its prime purpose the total embodiment of 'Gothic gloom' within the narrative. The inherent antagonism between the major symbols (the prince and the masquerade) destroys the full and serious atmosphere of the Gothic style, which appears to be embodied within the symbols (the prince and masquerade as a *part* of the decor) themselves.

It is this peculiarity, a 'gap in intention,' which instills a sense of irony deep within the tale; in that way, the totality of meaning which we wish to read into the tale is found not to be there because the tension in symbolism inscribes 'humor' within the narrative, so that it stops short of fulfilling the Gothic mode. More precisely, and in keeping with Poe's artistry, the fact that this tale is 'less than' Gothic simultaneously indicates that it is 'more than' Gothic; in fact, the style of architecture itself, which is described as being odd and excessive, could as easily be Baroque as it is Gothic. No single style can be deciphered out of the narrative's symbolic embodiments, since this "bizarre" imperial suite is not grounded in temporality: quite rightly, Poe emphasizes that its inherent style is 'fictional.'

Prospero's position amid the revelry itself is never really accounted for, essentially because there is no logic in the interaction between an "eccentric" prince (as he is described) and a mass of party-goers (the thousand courtiers). In fact, one immediately reads 'alienation' into Prospero's eccentricity of behavior so that there is no plausible explanation of why he imbues himself into a 'group of people,' especially since the latter force is a damper on the prince's eccentricity

that marks him as an individual. Put simply, there is no logic in the entire affair because the prince secludes himself to save his individual life from the ravages of the Red Death which lurks outside, but he still manages to lose this in the mass of frenzied revellers (especially when he is murdered). The greatest symbolic incongruity is therefore that the individual (the prince) coincides with the group (the masquerade) since both are 'secluded' within the abbey; that is why the dénouement itself appears to 'deconstruct' the wholeness of the previous scene since no symbolic cohesion was holding it together, save the mass of symbols (the prince, the decor, and the revellers) themselves. The tension between the two polarities (individual and group) is evident from the beginning of the text since the interweaving of prince and courtiers 'bulges at the seams,' and in turn, it must be forcibly kept intact by narrative logic which makes up for the lack of symbolic logic: "A strong and lofty wall girdled it in. This wall had gates of iron. The courtiers, having entered, brought furnaces and massy hammers and welded the bolts" (Harrison 4:250).

At first glance, it might be deemed odd that I have emphasized the prince as 'not being' a symbolic part of the masquerade because as the prince he must also represent his subjects (the inhabitants). On the contrary, while he symbolizes 'the state' in the conceptual sense, as indicated in the previous chapter, his excessive individuality (eccentricity) does not allow him to stand as a 'man of the people.' If anything is to be said regarding his position, it is that he exemplifies the many recluse-princes who are commonly found in the 'fairy tale' format: he is symbolically divested of the state which he controls by way of his imaginative fervor. And this antagonism between the major particulars of the text (prince and masquerade) is further mirrored, as I have indicated earlier, in the more subtle yet still peculiar symbolism of the architectural decor itself.

In the fourth paragraph, we are introduced to the oddity of design in Prospero's imperial suite. What is even more peculiar than this design is the interjection of how a 'normal' imperial suite is set up: "In many palaces, however, such suites form a long and straight vista, while the folding doors slide back nearly to the walls on either hand, so that the view of the whole extent is scarcely impeded" (4:251). Essentially, Poe has here inscribed into the text that 'which is not'; what is spoken of (a normal suite) is absent from the text by way of Prospero's eccentricity of design.

More significantly, the interjection of this phrase about a normal imperial suite forces the reader constantly, while reading, to keep in mind that the prince's exploits in 'unaccounted' forms of architecture (including the Gothic) appear as failures in the text. I say 'failures,' because we are consistently juxtaposing Prospero's version of an imperial suite to what a normal one looks like (after this point in the narrative), and in the process, we are keeping the design which the prince has inscribed into his abbey as non-holistic because we are now informed of an outer, different reality that has been deemed 'normal' in the text. In that way, Prospero's design (his Gothicism, if we use the frequent designation) appears to lack authenticity, both because he is eccentric in the first place and secondly, because we have now been informed that there are other, more normal types of design. While Prospero secludes himself in the castellated abbey to avoid a contamination of sorts, this does not exclude the narrator from interjecting the contaminating phrase about how normal suites look; more importantly, the conceptual invalidity which now surrounds the prince's taste in decor inscribes his Gothicism as not being 'flawed' in the rudimentary sense (which arises via the tension between the individual and the group) but rather as being 'partial' because the total normality-reality of design which is emphasized as 'being absent' from the text in turn subsumes and takes into account Prospero's 'individual' version of design, which happens to be odd because of his attempt to subsume a normal suite with this impressiveness that he has brought forth.

The interjection of how a normal suite of rooms looks, especially since it is not the theme at hand, serves to verify the 'partiality' of the bizarre atmosphere which Prospero has set up; in short, the Gothic element which we wish to see inherent within this narrative is not completely there since it is subsumed by the "totality of effect" which Poe has ingrained—the interweaving of the normal imperial suite which is not there with the bizarre reality that Prospero has created by way of kitsch and excess and which is also not there completely, allows for a greater synthesis to arise. The 'overall' effect of the prince's odd position, in relation to the group-masquerade, is that this text, therefore, is neither about 'normality' nor 'eccentricity,' since neither element is present in totality: the prince, as a symbol of suspicion and duplicity, since he exists neither completely in

nor out of the revelry, raises the irony of the tale beyond the mere 'flaws of tension' which are ingrained in the symbolic inconsistencies between group and individual. The irony is not, therefore, the simple one of Prospero's having escaped the Red Death to succumb to the masquerade, but rather, it is a part of the entire effect of his partial position within the revel since he both is and is not 'of it,' and all throughout that which he has designed is not complete and serious by way of excess, so that there is 'really' nothing present which he can be a 'part of.'

To be more direct, there is only one spot in the entire text where the word "Gothic" appears, and that is a few lines after the interjection about how a normal suite looks: "To the right and left, in the middle of each wall, a tall and narrow Gothic window looked out upon a closed corridor which pursued the windings of the suite" (4:251). Therefore, to read the tale as a basically serious Gothic text (because of the presence of the term Gothic) is to place our proof erroneously within this one sentence which itself is creating a tension between symbols (granted, one could say that the general atmosphere of the story is Gothic, but this is an assumption). The tension which is here arises when we read of how the "Gothic windows" look out into a "closed corridor" that matches the windings of the bizarre imperial suite. By emphasizing the presence of this corridor, which is irrelevant to the secluded revelry where Prospero is located, the narrator is again negating the authenticity and totality of the prince's design by making it subordinate to the totality of the text (which includes the mentioned corridor and the earlier, normal suite which is entirely absent).

Critics such as Ketterer might disagree with my last comment on how the narrator at times emphasizes the 'total' reality of the text in order to invalidate Prospero's design, precisely because of the immediate impression which the prince's odd architecture creates within the narrative. Ketterer, when dealing with the same paragraph which I am talking about, comments on how "the reality of time is hidden by the arrangement of the rooms" so that the deceptiveness of Prospero's simulation of the "arabesque" mode, by way of the masquerade, is kept intact (201). It is entirely true that the 'arrangement' of the rooms camouflages the sense of time passing (since it is a part of the prince's design), but this deceptiveness, as I have illustrated when speaking of the

narrator's emphasis on a normal suite's composition and on the external corridor which surrounds Prospero's design, is essentially negated by such interjections. That is why I have mentioned how the narrator emphasizes the 'totality of the text,' in contrast to the prince's mere 'totality of seclusion,' because the external symbols (the normal suite and the corridor) make of the narrative a more comprehensive design. The symbol of the 'waltz' is a case in point: while the arrangement of the rooms is deceptive and hides time, the totality of the entire scene in fact 'parodies' the passage of time by way of the repetitive waltzing through the rooms, which functions like clock-work. Again, this double relation exposes the inherent openness of Poe's set-up of the symbolism since the waltz in the rudimental sense functions internally (within) the masquerade to emphasize Prospero's uniqueness-originality due to its freshness within the text (it was a fairly new dance in the 1840s, at least in the U.S.), but when looked at externally by way of the corridor which the narrator speaks of, the waltz is seen to negate the inner 'deceptiveness' of the prince's revelry. Besides, there is an actual clock present in the abbey, within the black room, which further serves to destabilize the aesthetic completeness of the dreamy atmosphere; granted, the clock is a part of the inner decor which the prince has created and thus supports the gloominess (since it is gigantic and made of ebony), but it is, nonetheless, symbolically speaking, a 'time-piece.' The discussion may appear odd at this point, for I may be accused of agreeing with Ketterer that Prospero does simulate the 'arabesque' mode through the masquerade, while at the same time stating that his deceptiveness is made ineffectual through the interjection of external factors (the normal suite and the corridor). To the contrary, I have been arguing that his deceptiveness is negated by all of this (whereby his 'flawed' Gothicism is accounted for), but I have not said that the arabesque has also been negated out of the text: in fact, the arabesque element is to be found not within the masquerade but rather amid the totality of design of the text since the term 'arabesque' implies that there is a symmetry (a larger complementarity) to Prospero's deceptiveness, and that 'symmetry' is in fact present by way of the narrator's interjection of external factors which in turn negates the completeness of the prince's design and allows for textual comprehensiveness via symbolic openness.

The tension of the symbolic tapestry of Poe's tales (in this case the "Red Death") cannot be explained in any simple way, especially because the subtle irony of the tale rests not so much on the inconsistencies between symbols (as illustrated when I spoke of the prince in relation to the revel), but more so in the 'various perspectives' that are ingrained in the narrative (as demonstrated when I spoke of the external factors which the narrator introduces). G. R. Thompson, a critic who perhaps over-emphasizes the presence of irony in Poe's works, is nevertheless able to make some effective comments on this issue since he focuses on the interplay between grotesque and arabesque elements. Speaking on these two principles, he appropriately distinguishes between them: "The grotesque suggests more strongly a yoking of the chaotic, the fearful, and the comic; the arabesque suggests more strongly a sense of ironic perspectives in the midst of confusion and ominousness" (109). This interpretation is effective, for Thompson ties the concept of the arabesque to "ironic perspectives" which are to be found amid the "confusion and ominousness" of the grotesque, the symbolic underlayer, as it were. Ketterer, on the other hand, appears to have made the mistake of linking "deception" (the grotesque) with the arabesque directly, so that they appear as one and the same. Hence, Ketterer makes the further error of stating the following: "In a sense...the arabesque concept subsumes the grotesque. To see human reality as grotesque is to intuit simultaneously intimations of an arabesque reality" (37). This statement is not altogether correct, for he fuses the two elements together and thus believes that the presence of the grotesque immediately proves the existence of a larger, arabesque reality (since in his view, both function by way of deceptiveness).

However, in the genuine Gothic format to which Radcliffe adheres, unlike Poe, there is no arabesque reality at all; in her works, the grotesque elements are gradually explained away and as a result, the conclusion appears most natural and rational. In simpler terms, the grotesque element (particular distortion and fragmentation) is indeed necessary for the arabesque element (ironic and comprehensive perspectives) to arise, but the grotesque rudiments do not themselves indicate that a larger symmetry 'of design' is interwoven, and in that same instance, the arabesque reality (the narrator's external interjections) indicates that the grotesque particulars (prince, masquerade,

decor and the tension within) are present—the arabesque design alone, however, cannot exist within narrative—and this impossibility is proven by the 'total' collapse which the dénouement brings about.

It is necessary, before going further, that we briefly outline Poe's possible understanding and source of the terms 'grotesque' and 'arabesque,' the possible origins of the two terms, and perhaps my own understanding of how they operate in the "Red Death" tale. First we will look at the origins of the word 'grotesque': "*Grotesque* as both noun and adjective derives from the Italian words *grottesca* and *grottesco*, which were coined in the latter fifteenth century to designate an ancient Roman ornamental style of sculpture and painting which was discovered through excavations in Rome and other parts of Italy" (Thompson 106). In the Renaissance, the term 'grotesque' was used "first to designate the specific scroll type and gradually came [to be associated] with both the 'carelessly fantastic' and the ominous, with a world almost totally different from the familiar one of reality, [or as Kayser says] 'a world in which the realm of inanimate things is no longer separate from those of plants, animals, and human beings, and where the laws of statistics, symmetry, and proportion are no longer valid'" (106). Kayser further believes that the "sixteenth-century German usage of the term *grotesque* referred to the monstrous fusion of human and non-human elements as the most typical feature of the style and connected this with the 'infernal,' with devils, tortures, and monstrosities from Ovid, Dante, Giotto, and others" (106). Seventeenth-century French usage of 'grotesque' had a slightly different emphasis: it focused on the "'pleasantly ridiculous,' equally applicable to a person, a manner, a face, or an action; and at the beginning of the eighteenth century (and lingering into the twentieth) the French dictionaries defined grotesque as 'silly,' 'bizarre,' 'fantastic,' 'capricious,' 'ridiculous,' 'comic,' and 'burlesque'—usages which are in accord with the usual, reductive, interpretation of Poe's meaning" (107). The origins of the word 'arabesque' are perhaps more ambiguous. Immerwahr "suggests that the origin of the Romantic concept of arabesque is to be found in the 'romances' of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, in which the author has, with full awareness, carefully insinuated into his narrative incongruity in detail and antithesis in character and structure [such as in] the works of Wolfram, Boiardo, Ari-

osto, and Berni [which are] prime examples of this 'playful' tradition..." (108). Friedrich Schlegel, in his "Lectures on Poetry" (1800), "praised the works of Shakespeare and Cervantes for their 'artfully regulated confusion, that charming symmetry of contradictions, that strange and constant alternation between irony and enthusiasm present in the smallest parts of the whole,' a structure he called 'arabesque'" (107-8). In fact, for Schlegel, the idea of the 'arabesque' is based on a contradiction, "for while arabesque is indirectly mythology because poetry springs from it, it is in itself empty of poetry, 'without mythology,' 'philosophical painting,'...the arabesque landscape is not merely a dehumanized landscape...but...an entirely imaginary, empty landscape of the mind: '*Landscape* without any figures, Idyllic, Romantic in the great style,—*arabesques* are absolute (absolutely fanciful) painting'" (Brown 96). Such a notion of the 'arabesque,' as being something preparatory, out of which actual poetry is to spring forth, fits easily into Poe's "Red Death" tale which can be read as a perfect example of proto-poetry, something that foreshadows poetry because it is neither poetry nor prose. To use Schlegel's words, the tale can be read as an "absolute painting," and hence, it is an *arabesque* par excellence.

Poe would have probably gained most of his understanding of the terms 'grotesque' and 'arabesque' from two main sources. The first one, which is usually neglected but which Kayser cites, is Victor Hugo's preface to *Cromwell* (1827), in which he "used the word *grotesque* to indicate an ambiguous comic genre, creating what is on the one hand 'deformed and horrible,' and on the other what is 'comic and farcical'" (109). Pollin further believes that Poe most surely came across this information in "the June 1828 number of the *Foreign Quarterly Review*, a journal that Poe read regularly, [and which] carried a review of *Cromwell* with a summary of Hugo's conception of the historical development of literature (from the ode, to the epos, to the drama and the modern sensibility)" (110). The second source, which Thompson emphasizes as being the main one, is another article from the preceding year, 1827, also in the *Foreign Quarterly Review*: Sir Walter Scott's review of E. T. A. Hoffmann's works, entitled "On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition: and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffmann," which "has long been associated with Poe's conception of the Gothic and the grotesque and arabesque" (110). Thompson believes

that Scott tightly links the terms 'grotesque' and 'arabesque,' and he offers a piece of Scott's review as proof:

> ...the grotesque in his [Hoffmann's] compositions partly resembles the arabesque in painting, in which is introduced the most strange and complicated monsters, resembling centaurs, griffins, sphinxes, chimeras, rocs, and all other creatures of romantic imagination, dazzling the beholder as it were by the unbounded fertility of the author's imagination, and sating it by the rich contrast of all the varieties of shape and colouring, while there is in reality, nothing to satisfy the understanding or inform the judgement...[his] sickly and disturbed train of thought...led him to confound the supernatural with the absurd.... (114)

Suffice it to say that while Scott found Hoffmann's writing unsatisfactory, Poe obviously thought otherwise. I would add, regarding my personal notions, that if Poe was truly influenced by Scott's review, then it is highly probable that he also 'links' the terms 'grotesque' and 'arabesque' in a tight fashion as does Scott. I have thus, when looking at the "Red Death" tale, taken it for granted that the two terms are interwoven, or rather, that they exist in complementarity. I do not believe that the two terms are identical (and so I earlier indicated that the arabesque is indicative of an overall design while the grotesque refers more so to fragmentation and distortion), but it is impossible to know whether Poe also believed this. What we do know, and the tale demonstrates this, is that Poe believed the two terms to be 'inherently linked,' as exemplified earlier by the title of his 1840 collection of stories, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (this being similar, at least in a subtle way, to Saussure's notion of the signifier-signified relationship, where one part cannot exist without the other). We can further say that while the 'signifier' and the 'signified' are *inherently different but still linked*, so too are the 'grotesque' and 'arabesque' *inherently different but still linked*. The Red Death would then be the signified arabesque in the tale. Such logical reasoning is the next best thing to actually questioning Poe as to what his understanding of the two terms is.

This discussion requires that we jump to paragraph seven of the tale, for it is here, as Thompson himself has noted, that Poe demonstrates that this tale is one of those 'comprehensive rarities' in which both the grotesque and arabesque principles are present (122). More significantly, the narrator 'links' the two elements while staying away from making of them the same principle. We distinctly read of how the "masqueraders...were grotesque" and that there were also present "arabesque figures" (Harrison 4:254). Poe does not choose words carelessly and thus, it is defini-

tive that he has labelled 'characters' as being "grotesque" and only "figures" as being "arabesque": put simply, the particulars of the masquerade (the revellers) are part of Prospero's deceptive reality, but only figures have earned the status of being arabesque, precisely because the arabesque is referring to the 'totality' of design of the tale and not to the mere architectural delusions which the prince has implemented. These figures can be nothing other than arabesque because the term 'figure' itself refers to an outline or shape, and essentially, to a design or pattern which is technically an 'intangible' form in material terms; it is thus appropriate and in keeping with the entire design of the text that a 'masked figure' comes to subsume the grotesque particulars of the revel. There were "figures" present all along in the masquerade, as paragraph seven indicates, but the new presence is doubly intangible and hence 'comprehensive' since it is both 'masked' and is a figure—a type of design amid a design—the text within the masquerade. It is unfortunate that Thompson's effective discourse on the principles of this tale descends into confusion when he echoes Ketterer's comments, because when dealing with Poe's philosophy of decoration, he states that "Poe's arabesque...reads like a grotesquerie of the ideal" (125).

In the case of the "Red Death" tale, the arabesque principle of 'open perspective' exists as an ideal within Prospero's grotesquerie via the narrator's interjections. To view the arabesque design of ironic perspectives, which I deemed 'multi-fluency' earlier on, as a "grotesquerie of the ideal," the critic must be a minimalist so as to think of the 'ideal' as being simple rather than comprehensive, and there is definitely no simplicity in this text. Thompson finally says of this tale that Poe appears to link the arabesque concept with "gloomy Gothic figures," thereby "suggesting the early eighteenth-century conception of the 'Saracen' style of the Gothic" (125). Figures, as indicated earlier, are not inherently linked to any generic conception (in this case the Gothic) since they are shadowy and indicative 'of design,' as indicated in paragraph seven of the tale, and Thompson's attempt to see similarities in Poe's implementation of the arabesque principle with eighteenth-century notions of Gothicism is inappropriate. As exposed by way of the symbolic openness of the text's foundations, Poe is *not* a particularly Gothic writer, and this is proven by the partiality which Prospero exhibits in regard to his surroundings; the Gothicism is not genuine, for

the prince is both a part and remains aloof to the revel due to his eccentricity, and so, he is at best a pseudo-serious character. This entire discourse also demonstrates the dangers of 'inreading' (as exemplified by deconstructionist thought) because Poe has merely brought the fashion of his own day into this text, in order to subsume it by way of effective design (the arabesque). The Gothicism in this tale cannot in any way be genuine and austere, in the spirit of original medieval architecture, or even in the spirit of Gothic literature of the 18th-century, because it is a product of the 1840s—a period which witnessed a phenomenon known as the 'Gothic revival' which was more excessive and, paradoxically, more 'artistically comprehensive' than anything before or after due to its integration of all worldly styles. The decor is also known as 'Victorian Gothic,' and the particulars of the text prove its presence since there are Gothic windows, there is waltzing, and most significantly, there are "velvet tapestries" which hang "all over the ceiling and down the walls, falling in heavy folds upon a carpet of the same material and hue" (Harrison 4:252). Prospero fails in this revival while the narrator succeeds by evoking it without participating—and thus proving the text's interpretive flexibility.

The 'linking' present in this tale between the grotesque and arabesque principles (as shown in paragraph seven), should appear hierarchical by this point in the discussion. Unlike Ketterer's implicit fusion of the two elements, Thompson's distinguishing between them is more appropriate to the inconsistencies in symbolism that are present in the "Red Death" tale (between the prince and the revel). However, the arabesque element further subsumes the grotesque underlayer, and this is in keeping with Poe's ideas on the "totality of effect." Put simply, while the characters (the masqueraders and prince) may appear odd and hence Gothic, the comprehensiveness of perspective that is brought about by the narrator's interjections remains within the realm of non-characterization (of arabesque design). The irony of the text therefore rests directly within the structure of that design (the providing of more than one perspective, not just of the 'character' Prospero), and not in the symbolic inconsistencies themselves where the 'tension' resides that is incorrectly labelled as irony, namely, of 'saying one thing and doing another.' Prospero exemplifies this latter irony when he creates immunity from the pestilence and simultaneously 'contaminates'

everything with its presence. In the narrative, as demonstrated in the hierarchical relationship between the grotesque and arabesque elements, Poe has set up an equation in which figuration subsumes characterization: what this means is that the textual 'shaping' of complexity subsumes the mere 'describing' of its particulars, so that the symbolic inconsistencies themselves reside amid a larger totality of fusion. Because of this latter effect, I had earlier spoken of how the arabesque concept's subsuming of the grotesque inscribes 'symmetry' (a larger complementarity or perhaps a designed coherency, the kind that arises when a near 'mathematical' logic is used to formulate a complex narrative pattern) within the text, and thus, the presence of 'symmetry within complexity' (the narrator's comprehensiveness within Prospero's deceptiveness) is inherently ironic—but not flawed.

It is appropriate at this point to speak of Poe's ambiguous characterization of Prospero, for it further indicates the hierarchical linking of the arabesque and grotesque principles in this text; by speaking of 'ambiguous characterization,' I am referring to the two sections of the tale where the prince is called a "duke" (paragraphs four and six). Because of Poe's pedantic approach to word choice and holistic textuality, we cannot simply dismiss the presence, at two points (in all versions of the tale), of the word "duke" as being an error; we can assume that Poe has interjected this word as being synonymous with the word 'prince,' but in the technical sense, a duke is one step lower in rank than a prince (I realize that in Germany and France, dukes outrank princes, and perhaps in Italy, but in Prospero's case 'prince' appears to denote royal status, that is to say, it is a personal title and not a mere rank). Due to this technical discrepancy between the two words, Prospero's position within the text, and in relation to the masquerade, cannot be ascertained with any degree of certainty; this is why I earlier deemed him to be symbolically 'duplicitous and suspicious' in the text, among other reasons. Irwin's 'mathematical' analysis of "The Purloined Letter" bears striking similarities to the set-up of the "Red Death" tale, for he originally speaks of how Poe has inscribed the interaction between "algebraic signs" within the former tale (of the simultaneous presence of both the initials S and D on the same letter), and that "he means for us to register [this precise interaction] as we watch this game in which the same letter (missive) is inscribed

with two different letters (alphabetic characters signifying 'sameness' and 'difference') to indicate its self-identity" (393). This statement easily accounts for Prospero's being both 'aloof' and a 'part of' the masquerade which he holds, but one may still counter my arguments on how the arabesque requires but then subsumes the grotesque principle by stating that it is all tentative (not factually provable) in relation to the tale itself. In contrast, by juxtaposing Irwin's type of reading of another of Poe's tales to this one, it becomes quite evident that Prospero's tension-filled relationship with the revelry (the group) is surrounded with the same algebraic interactions that Irwin sees implicit in "The Purloined Letter," interactions that perfectly mimic my reading of the arabesque and grotesque principles. Irwin, regarding "difference," states the following: "In the differential calculus the lower-case *d* stands for the differential of a variable, which is to say, for an infinitesimal difference, as in the expression *dx*..." (393). Regarding the case of "sameness," he says this: "Similarly, in the integral calculus...'a slender, elongated form of the letter' S...stands for the integral, that is, for an infinite sum of infinitesimal differences..." (393).

These two algebraic principles are thus mathematical versions of the textual interaction between the grotesque and arabesque principles (between the prince and the greater design); in short, the grotesque principle is a differential of the arabesque design and is simultaneously 'integral' to the latter's survival within the tale. Taken a step further, the masquerade itself (as a mass cohesion) becomes symbolically the 'sum of infinitesimal differences' (of all the revellers who make of it a holistic device within the tale), and consequently, while Prospero wishes to remain differentiated from the masquerade as an 'eccentric' individual, he is nevertheless 'integral' to its survival, and thus, he is in the end fully integrated into its presence by way of the 'figure' of the intruder, the textual indicator of the tale's overall arabesque symmetry (of course not the symmetry itself, which comes in at the dénouement). Prospero is in that way a permanent 'part' of his environment, irrespective of personal preference, since a differential is always secondary to its integral, as is the grotesque both subsumed and distinguishable (through deconstruction) from the arabesque principle (of ironic and total perspective). Poe has therefore subtly and effectively insinuated the prince's status as a differential via the word duke and the further alliteration of d's: "He

disregarded the *decora* of mere fashion" (Harrison 4:253).

In Poe's type of short story, especially a 'comprehensive rarity' such as the "Red Death" tale, the grotesque principle (the inconsistencies in the symbolic underlayer) is 'integrally linked' to the arabesque design (the ironic totality of textual multi-fluency), so that what initially appears as the "flawed Gothic" style, as Thompson terms it, is really not flawed at all. As I have indicated through the discussion so far, the Gothic reading which can be effectively done at the symbolic level via the tension between the individual and the group and the general 'uncanniness' of the decor (deconstruction), is ultimately labelled as being flawed because that Gothicism is not followed through by the narrator's own 'secure' imbedding within that atmosphere (by way of external interjections that are not in keeping with Prospero's indulgences). In that way, the textual completeness itself (the arabesque design) transcends the mere sensationalism which the prince has set up, precisely because of the narrator's presence (even though it is subtle by way of third-person narration). The question of "flawed Gothicism" can therefore be dismissed entirely, in relation to Poe's theories on composition, since the ultimate "unity of effect," which he speaks of, subsumes the mere inconsistencies of the symbols. In fact, the irony that resides in the arabesque design which arises when the narrator speaks of the prince's 'relation' to the masquerade takes into account the previous, symbolic inconsistencies. Put simply, what appears as a 'gap in intention' when one looks at the symbols directly (a faulty narrative that does not fulfill its purpose completely), becomes an 'intentional gap' when one takes into account the narrator's position as well (a solid narrative whose purpose is to posit and record faultiness), because that initial gap in symbolism is what allows for the ironic totality of the arabesque design to emerge.

In this way, if the symbolic inconsistencies are looked upon as being 'intentional' on Poe's part, does a deconstructionist reading of that underlayer provide a contextual perspective—in the sense that both Poe's theories and the tale as a final product are taken into account. When we contextualize the tale's particulars, what becomes evident is that the discrepancy, tension, and 'flaw' in symbolism is indicative of a textual division that is made between the grotesque and arabesque principles. This division does not indicate that the principles are not linked, but rather, that their

respective identities are different, so that neither an 'inreading' (grotesque) nor a 'general-fluent' reading (arabesque) are effective separately, in relation to the Poe tale, since both must be undertaken in order that the true ironic totality of Poe's textual "unity of effect" comes through. More importantly, it is the narrator's 'fluency' within the tale that exposes Prospero's duplicitous position within the masquerade (that he is both 'of it' and 'not of it'), and this is possible, logically speaking, because the arabesque design conversely indicates that grotesque and 'inconsistent' particulars are present. The text is therefore set up in such a way that the narrator's position emphasizes (via contaminating remarks) Prospero's "flawed Gothicism" in the same instance that the prince's flaw indicates the 'presence' of a narrator (the arabesque voice).

If this reasoning is taken further, the intruder at the masquerade also reaffirms the prince's partiality of presence in relation to the revel by being the 'mask' of the arabesque design, and inherently, of the narrator. And so, the Red Death itself stands as the narrator's symbol within the narrative, for it is constantly there but 'remote' in relation to the prince and his revel—the return of the Red Death at the dénouement thus reaffirms the narrator's full control over the tale since he is the only one who has the 'textual authority' to conclude the events. This is why I earlier spoke of how only a 'contextualized' deconstructionist reading is effective in relation to Poe's artistry since it better accounts for the final, arabesque design of the text than a typical reading of fragmentation, tension, and flaw. In this case, the intentional gaps in symbolism indicate that the arabesque presence, which is both equated with the intruder and the Red Death, is inherently tied to the narrator who interweaves a symmetrical irony to Prospero's endeavors simply by taking the text to the 'very end' of discourse, whereby the realized impossibility allows for no further discourse; because when the Red Death arrives, the arabesque exists without grotesque support.

The fact that the grotesque and arabesque principles are both linked and inherently different explains why the Poe tale is susceptible to 'flawed' readings itself, since those readings unknowingly and tentatively characterize the symbolically paradoxical interaction between these two principles as being a genuine flaw. More significantly, the linking of these principles in the "Red Death" tale indicates a need for 'openness' on the part of the reader, that will in turn mimic

the openness of the text's symbolic tapestry. By this I mean the following: when Prospero's ingenuity in design and his relationship with the masquerade are looked upon solely, without keeping in mind the narrator's interjections (of the corridor and the normal imperial suite), what arises is the opinion that something is 'missing' from the tale which would secure its "unity of effect," since the prince ultimately fails in his endeavors at keeping out the pestilence. However, just as the grotesque and arabesque principles are here linked, so too are both Prospero's 'internal' world and the narrator's references to an 'external' one linked within one symbolic sweep. By 'symbolic sweep,' I mean to say that everything is accounted for in the intentional set-up of inconsistencies.

In the seventh paragraph, in regard to the black chamber, we read the following: "...for the night is waning away; and there flows a ruddier light through the blood-colored panes; and the blackness of the sable drapery appals..." (4:254). One would easily assume from the context that the word "ruddier" refers to a stronger, growing light, but, logically speaking, a ruddier light is in fact a deeper, fuller, darker red that becomes, therefore, gradually more appropriate to the black furnishings of the westernmost apartment. This redness is one that approaches blackness and hence full unity with the room's atmosphere, for when the color red gets ruddier (as the narrator has indicated), it gets redder but not brighter, since the latter phenomenon would actually bring the color closer to orange. This is paradoxical in itself, but becomes doubly so when juxtaposed to the "night" that "is waning away"; obviously enough, as the night wanes away (approaches dawn in the total context of the tale, irrespective of the fact that it is still not midnight), the candles of the tripods which light up the rooms become shorter and their light perhaps less impressive (thus the red gets ruddier). The oddness results when we realize that this particular chamber gets darker (symbolizing an 'infinite' night, especially when the candles burn out) as the 'real night' itself shortens in duration; the division between the outer and inner worlds (the world beyond the castle's walls and Prospero's castellated masquerade, respectively) is therefore being re-emphasized at this point. This would appear incongruous initially because there are two time-frames occurring in the tale (Prospero's and the 'real' one), but there is still unity in the incongruous symbolism itself (in the paradox of the events), for as the 'night wanes away' it also gets

'deeper,' so to speak: it becomes more concrete by way of its lengthening of presence as it nears its inevitable termination, and as a result, the 'outer' night becomes embodied in the castellated revelry as well, by way of the paradoxical light source for the rooms, the 'extraneous yet internal' tripods—which stand in the temporally and existentially ambiguous "corridor" that the narrator has spoken of in the first place (outside of the rooms but still within the castle).

There are other points at which we are able to effectively distinguish between the narrator's arabesque design and Prospero's grotesquerie, and in fact, to observe the interweaving of the arabesque amid the latter; one point is at the beginning of paragraph nine. We read as follows: "In truth the masquerade license of the night was nearly unlimited; but the figure in question had out-Heroded Herod, and gone beyond the bounds of even the prince's indefinite decorum" (4:255). Now, if the "masquerade license of the night" was indeed "unlimited," then how could the mummer have "gone beyond the bounds of even the prince's indefinite decorum?" This sentence relates to the principles that Poe set down later in *Eureka*, and it is inherently parodic of Prospero's own principles, because there Poe clearly states how it is impossible for one infinity to be greater than another. More importantly, Poe has inscribed the 'rudiments' of this later work into the "Red Death" tale via the narrator, who distinctly says that the license of the masquerade was "nearly unlimited"; this echoes the substance of *Eureka*, where Poe speaks of how the universe is only *not* infinite (a slight imperfection exists that remains imperceptible to the human eye) (Benton 118). And it is this 'imperfection' in Prospero's design which makes it inevitable that the mummer will appear excessive and inappropriate to the revellers; in retrospect, he is a logical part and outcome of an *almost* perfect design. Had the license of the revelry been truly unlimited, the intruder's outrageousness would have been easily welcomed and made non-unusual by way of the frequency of its reappearance in a factually infinite masquerade.

This subtle imperfection that permeates the prince's masquerade is re-echoed in the dénouement, when the Red Death itself emerges to nullify the entire revel. The last few lines are the result of Prospero's design being *almost* infinite, so that the contamination which he had fled from has entered the premises by way of this slight imperfection and in turn, the prince's 'reality'

has collapsed. What is interesting to note is that the conclusion, even though it is still technically narrated in third-person, sustains a 'strong echo' of the first-person technique; this has resulted because in the conclusion, that which the narrator has previously spoken of (Prospero, the revel, and the decor) is absent now that the Red Death has crystallized. It is actually quite logical that the narrator now, essentially, speaks while alone and subsequently in the first-person, because the arabesque principle is now existing, very briefly, without the grotesque underlayer of the text. Some critics might argue at this point that the break between third-person and first-person narration is not that strong in the dénouement, because of the presence of first-person contamination at three different spots earlier on in the tale, in paragraphs four, eight, and nine—"let me tell," "I have told," and "I have painted," respectively (Harrison 4:251,255). If anything is to be said regarding this, it is that instead of destroying the tale's third-person facade, these three subjective phrases further add to the text's already self-referential nature (in the sense that the narrator is emphasizing his presence, and thus, the presence of narration). Such comments effectively demonstrate that even in a third-person narration, 'objectivity' is a mere illusion because of the forever 'contaminating' narrator. Put simply, the narrator always enacts a contaminating relationship with the third-person because such a narration still requires that the narrator 'sustain' it (pure third-person narration would thus be a non-narration, or rather, a pure third-person form does not exist). Hence, I believe the arabesque principle to be existing independently of the grotesque for a very brief moment, but only in the concluding, essentially *first-person* paragraph, and this sheds light on the reason why this tale is susceptible to inreading and is a 'comprehensive rarity'; if we think back to the earlier narration, while Prospero's 'flawed' revel was taking place, we now realize that the arabesque principle was indeed existing in the same instance that the grotesque symbolism was, precisely because the narrator was (via his external interjections) insinuating his first-person voice into a technically third-person narrative. In turn, Poe has insinuated into this tale that third-person narration sustains the mere 'illusion of objectivity,' in the same way that I have demonstrated how only contextual deconstruction takes into account the symbolic openness of Poe's type of artistry, since inconsistency and 'symbolic tension' are the signs of some sort of interwoven partiality, and

not of aesthetic 'flaw.'

We can even read further, more minute inconsistencies into the last lines of the text: "And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired" (4:258). The tone which was previously set up in the tale evoked the ebony clock as being a symbol of something ominous (the potentiality, the inevitability of death, if not the outright embodiment itself). It is thus most peculiar that its "life" now goes out; this is a paradoxical interjection, because only 'by living could it have symbolized death,' *per se*. And the subsequent expiration of the flames indicates that the successive ticking-thought of the clock was somehow firing-up the flames, keeping them invigorated. Hence, the black room was the 'life of the party,' so to speak. "Darkness and decay" are thus the natural residue-exhaust of the flames' expiration, and are expected, but how is the Red Death still holding "dominion" if it had earlier experienced the "despairing posture of [its] fall?" Technically, the Red Death has been posthumously rehabilitated to survive 'beyond' the darkness and decay which surrounds it; realistically speaking, it survives because it signifies the text's arabesque design, which the narrator has interwoven. In the case of the mummer, we earlier read of how his "tall figure stood erect and motionless within the shadow of the ebony clock" and of how he was thereupon lynched and found intangible (4:257-8). This indicates that the "tall figure" could possibly be nothing more than the 'shadow' of the clock itself; symbolically, it is the dead exhaust of its ticking vitality (by using the term 'shadow,' I am also attempting to be symbolic rather than practical, in order to emphasize the link between the clock and the masked figure). Therefore, its "life" indeed goes out with "the last of the gay" since it is, interpretively speaking, destroyed by the maddened revellers who break it open and get rid of the clock-face (the "corpse-like mask," as Poe deems it), whereby creative death sets in. The most symbolically open phrase is of course the second-half of the third sentence of the conclusion: "...and died each in the despairing posture of his fall" (4:258). The implementation of the word "his" obviously refers to 'their' fall, of the revellers, as indicated in the first portion of the sentence, but intrinsically it refers back to the "despairing posture" of the evoked phantasm (the Red Death). In essence, it too falls with the courtiers, because now that time has stopped (via the destruction of

the clock) the paradoxical 'vitality of death' has ceased as well. This is why the text attempts to revolve, through Prospero's initiative, around one point (his sustaining of the masquerade), since his eccentric attempt at immortality requires stasis, but because this gesture is inherently 'flawed,' the mummer and subsequently the Red Death become, oddly enough, victims also by way of process; Poe has thus effectively ingrained into the text the paradoxical rule that the vitality-inevitability of death also sustains aesthetic vitality (the need for art to counter-balance mortality), albeit temporarily, whereby Prospero's death is accounted for, since to become immortal he must become an art-piece (static). The logic further indicates that process-reality (the revel), according to Poe's set-up of the tale, is at best 'action art' and essentially, only partial art. The heaping of symbolic inconsistencies in the conclusion thus refers back to my previous comments on the techniques of narration, because the third-person mode is here subsumed completely and appears to break apart under the narrator's own presence of voice—and essentially, by what becomes the 'tail end' of the arabesque design. I have said that the third-person mode is here 'subsumed completely' in the dénouement because, let me emphasize once again, who is now speaking other than the narrator—everyone else is dead. We have clear textual evidence that the narrator's first-person presence is engraved within the third-person mode, because the masquerade, the wild facade, and the courtiers who were constantly being evoked (referred to) in the third-person have now dropped off. The dénouement thus resembles those rare scenarios when a magician is not aware that we can see the strings, levers, and devices which are employed in the sustaining of that 'magic,' and, hence, he continues with his demonstration, thinking that we still believe in the reality of the situation.

The tension in symbolism of the tale's concluding paragraph, other than demonstrating the breakdown of the grotesque underlayer (the revel), serves to re-emphasize what I had earlier referred to as being Prospero's 'duplicitous' position within the text. The conclusion makes explicit the fact that the tale is appropriately susceptible to deconstructionist inreadings precisely because the prince symbolizes a type of 'identity struggle,' and hence, the flaws and tension of the text arise from this primary thematic point. I stated that Poe's writing is 'appropriately' suscepti-

ble to deconstructionist readings because these readings have in part contributed to the internationalization of this author; inreading alone is not a complete critical process in relation to such tales, but a form of 'contextual' deconstruction (that looks at the text as a design rather than a 'fragment'), as I have already demonstrated, is effective in bringing out the specific aesthetic complexities that are distinctive to Poe.

Even before deconstruction was institutionalized as a form of critical interpretation, Poe's status as a significant author had begun to be secured in France; owing to the uniqueness of the artistry, Baudelaire felt it necessary to translate the works of such an author, so that Poe's literary influence on subsequent writers was secured with the publishing of *Histoires extraordinaires* (1856) and *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires* (1857) (Quinn 101). Perhaps because of the need to look at Poe's entire writing contextually, Baudelaire also translated the longer and more ponderous works later on (*Eureka* in 1863) and paid attention to the more obscure tales such as the "Philosophy of Furniture," so as to give "France a conception of Poe's work that would be fully in keeping with its sometimes surprising variety" (107).

It would not be sufficient to continue without briefly looking at Baudelaire's translation of the "Red Death" tale, entitled "Le Masque de la Mort Rouge" (1857), in order to see how authentic the translation has stayed with regard to the original, because it is this translation (along with the translations of the other tales) that for the first time allowed French literary circles a solid access to Poe's oeuvre. In turn, in a larger historical context, Baudelaire's ability to translate the tales indirectly allowed such critics as Lacan and Derrida to comment on Poe's works, this being a gradual process that finally secured Poe's internationalization. Put simply, had the tales not been translated, there would have been a greater chance that Lacanian and deconstructionist readings would not have been applied to "The Purloined Letter," among other tales. We will now look at some key passages of the "Red Death" and "Mort Rouge" in order to analyze the similarities, or lack thereof. Quinn has compared Baudelaire's translation of the first section of Poe's fifth paragraph to the tone and content of the original, and comes up with a favorable comment. He emphasizes that while there are differences in word choice and syntax, the overall effect of the original is nonethe-

less captured: "We notice that in his translation of the passage Baudelaire diminishes *clang* to *tic-tac*, and of course the associations of the English word *brazen* are happily absent from his phrase *poumons d'airain*....Overlooking the significance of Poe's faltering rhythm, he ends his translation in one smoothly fluent line. But if unaware of the precise *means* by which Poe gained his effect, Baudelaire was fully responsive to the effect those means produced" (120-1). I have looked at the introduction and dénouement of Poe's tale, juxtaposed them to Baudelaire's version of those exact sections, and then checked for similarities and major discrepancies, so as to see if Quinn's comment is a fair summary of the translation. I first began with the introduction (perhaps it is best to quote Baudelaire's version in its entirety):

> La *Mort Rouge* avait pendant longtemps dépeuplé la contrée. Jamais peste ne fut si fatale, si horrible. Son avatar, c'était le sang,—la rougeur et la hideur du sang. C'étaient des douleurs aiguës, un vertige soudain, et puis un suintement abondant par les pores, et la dissolution de l'être. Des taches pourpres sur le corps, et spécialement sur le visage de la victime, la mettaient au ban de l'humanité et lui fermaient tout secours et toute sympathie. L'invasion, le progrès, le résultat de la maladie, tout cela était l'affaire d'une demi-heure. (*Nouvelles Histoires Extraordinaires* 2:151)

The French version replaces Poe's "had long" of the first sentence with 'had for long' via the 'for' of *pendant*. The bigger problem is that *dépeuplé* is not Poe's "devastated"; *dévasté* would have been a more accurate choice. The sentence is still quite good for it translates Poe's "country" into *contrée*, which is better than *pays* (this refers more to 'land' than country *per se*). The second sentence is also quite similar, except that it drops Poe's "or" and replaces "hideous" with *horrible*. The third sentence does a variation on Poe's structure and completely drops the "seal" which follows "Avatar," and changes "horror" into *hideur*. The fourth sentence is quite good, except that its *suintement abondant* is more of an 'abundant oozing' as opposed to Poe's "profuse bleeding." Sentence five does the greatest variation on Poe's original, for it drops in *pourpres*, which is a kind of crimson or even purple (if designating a symbol instead of a stain), while the original uses "scarlet"; it also changes Poe's "fellow-men" to *humanité* and translates "aid" to *secours* instead of *aide*. The last sentence is better, but somewhat inaccurately translates Poe's "seizure" into *invasion* and "incidents" into *affaire*. To summarize, it appears that while Baudelaire attempted at all times to stay true to Poe's original text, he was often compelled (for the sake of readability) to vary the

structure of Poe's sentences in order to write normal French, with good grammar and syntax. If we attempt a pure translation (transliteration) of Poe's introduction, we get something which (and I am no authority in such matters) is probably more accurate as far as content is concerned but is at the same time bad French:

> La "Mort Rouge" avait longtemps dévasté la contrée. Jamais peste ne fut si fatale, ni si hideuse. Le sang était son Avatar et son sceau—la rougeur et la horreur du sang. C'étaient les douleurs aiguës, et un vertige soudain, et puis un saignement profus par les pores, avec une dissolution. Les taches écarlates sur le corps et spécialement sur le visage de la victime, étaient *l'interdit de la peste que lui fermaient dehors de l'aide* et de la sympathie des hommes. Et la saisie entière, le progrès et le résultat de la maladie, étaient les incidents d'une demi-heure. [The italicized portion is an obvious error in French, but I have transliterated directly from "the pest ban which shut him out from the aid."]

For the sake of comprehensiveness, we will also subject the conclusion of Baudelaire's translation to this same treatment (close scrutiny and re-translation). This is his conclusion:

> On reconnut alors la présence de la *Mort Rouge*. Elle était venue comme un voleur de nuit. Et tous les convives tombèrent un á un dans les salles de l'orgie inondées d'une rosée sanglante, et chacun mourut dans la posture désespérée de sa chute.
>
> Et la vie de l'horloge d'ébène disparut avec celle du dernier de ces êtres joyeux. Et les flammes des trépieds expirèrent. Et les Ténèbres, et la Ruine, et la *Mort Rouge* établirent sur toutes choses leur empire illimité. (2:157)

The most obvious difference is that the French version breaks Poe's dénouement right in the middle, thereby making two paragraphs; Baudelaire probably felt that this would be more elegant and would better capture the 'tumbling effect' of the conclusion in French (this is speculation). The first sentence translates Poe's "now" into *alors*, which is more equivalent to 'at that time'; the *on reconnut* which comes at the beginning is perhaps closer to 'one recognized' than to Poe's "was recognized." The second sentence does an ideological shift on Poe's original because it feminizes the Red Death via *elle*, as opposed to Poe's "he"; the *voleur de nuit* is essentially 'thief of the night,' and not Poe's "thief in the night." Of course, these are all minute variations which do not seriously distort the content, and hardly touch the ominous tone, but are still relevant to point out. The third sentence reverses part of the phrasing of Poe's original and does an ambiguous twist on the middle section of sentence, so that it reads as follows: *And all the convivial individuals dropped one by one in the halls of the orgy bathed in a bloody dew, and each died in the posture despairing of his fall.* Such a distortion, though, appears normal in the French language. Sentences four and five

are by far the most accurate, and almost perfectly imitate the phrasing of Poe's original. The last sentence does a slight variation, in the sense that *Ruine* is not exactly Poe's "Decay," but I suppose this all depends on whether we believe that the "Decay" is referring to the decomposition of the now dead revellers, or to the deterioration that Prospero's castellated abbey will now experience as the ages unfold (as an architectural relic). Most probably, "Decay" is meant to refer to the deterioration of both (but *Ruine* only takes into account the architectural part). The last section of the sentence does the main variation; instead of "held illimitable dominion over all," as in Poe's original, Baudelaire's version gives us 'established over all things their illimitable empire.' On the whole, while such variations are inevitable when one translates, Baudelaire somehow manages to keep intact the gloominess of the dénouement, even if sacrificing some of Poe's phrasing so as to make the translation readable. (Just as an aside, I would further say that Baudelaire remains true to Poe's three-time interjection of the first-person mode into the text, thereby making the larger narrative structure quite accurate: "laissez-moi vous décrire," "je l'ai dit," and "je l'ai décrite," respectively (2:151,154,155).) Suffice it to say that Baudelaire creates an effective compromise between translation and mere adaptation, or as Quinn rightly puts it, a sophisticated translation such as Baudelaire's is nothing short of a *tour de force* (121). If Baudelaire had opted in favor of pure, direct translation, even when it was not advisable, a very ungrammatical piece of work would have resulted (I offer my own as an example):

> Et maintenant on reconnut la présence de la Mort Rouge. Elle était venue comme un voleur dans la nuit. Et un á un tombèrent les convives dans les salles des rosées sanglantes de leurs festivités, et mourut chacun dans la posture désespérée de sa chute. Et la vie de l'horloge d'ébène allait dehors avec celle du dernier de ces êtres joyeux. Et les flammes des trépieds expirèrent. Et les Ténèbres et la Putréfaction et la Mort Rouge tinrent un dominion illimité sur tous.

With Baudelaire having set down the foundations, it was then the 'pure art' movements of *décadence* and *symbolisme* which bridged Poe's influence into Europe of the 20th century; most notably, Mallarmé and Valéry were interested in Poe's unique artistry. Mallarmé was impressed by Poe's methods of writing verse, and so, he "dreamed of perfecting the art of writing and of giving it a universal value to be realized in a book" (Vines 2). It was however Valéry who first noticed the "effect of extreme intellectual self-consciousness" in Poe's works and thus, his "ultimate goal was

not to create a supreme work, but rather to understand the mind, his own mind, during the act of artistic creation" (2). Granted, after Valéry's death in 1945, interest in Poe appears to have subsided, but this is a result of the fact that his works have moved from the realm of influence and historical grounding to the realm of 'literary criticism,' and it is here that Poe's artistry has again become a point of focus. Owing to the establishment of 'deconstruction' as a method of criticism, Poe's writing has become 'appropriately' susceptible to inreading. Most notably, as mentioned earlier, Lacan and Derrida have made comments on the works (I am here thinking of the compilation entitled *The Purloined Poe*). And even with deconstruction's falling out of favor in the 1990s, the critical fascination with this oeuvre shows no signs of weakening. On the contrary, post-structuralism finds the 'symbolic inconsistencies' in the works, as exemplified in the "Red Death" tale, most problematic; more precisely, post-structuralism appears to be having a carnival of sorts with Poe's stories and theories via its discourse of 'mass consumerism and otherness' (of cultural materialism), that in fact tends to work around the texts themselves, much like the old psychoanalytic criticism did (such as Marie Bonaparte's).

As I have indicated by emphasizing Prospero's suspicious position in the tale, the symbolic tensions which give rise to that suspicion further expose that the prince demonstrates the struggle of self-identification, or rather, its failure. Thus, the critic must take care to assess this symbolic struggle 'contextually,' for the tale itself is, by way of the narrator, simulating the process of literary deconstruction: one must consistently keep the arabesque design in mind when assessing the underlayer, for the tale's identity itself, much like Prospero's, exists in an ambiguous position—it is both purely textual and of the narrative voice—it is thus a 'comprehensive' aestheticism which is distinctive to Poe. I may be accused of having overindulged in the interaction of the grotesque and arabesque principles in this tale, but their full interaction does explain why Poe has frequently been deemed a "flawed Gothic" writer, precisely because the arabesque 'design' subsumes the grotesque 'decor.' This interaction of the two principles also accounts for Prospero's partiality in relation to the masquerade which is created under his supervision. By using the term 'partiality,' I am referring to his incompleteness at the revel since he both is and is not of it, via his

eccentricity and subsequent inability to masquerade effectively. I am not saying that by being partial he is as well 'biased' within the text, although he does lean in favor of his individuality-life, which the masquerade is unsuccessfully called for to sustain.

This is why I am using the revised version of the tale for analysis (which appeared in the *Broadway Journal* in 1845), precisely because, as mentioned in the introduction, Poe has replaced the word "Mask" with "Masque" in the title, in the sense that Masque is a grammatical fusion of both mask and masquerade, and this better accounts for the prince's 'identity struggle.' Unlike the 'group,' which is given the sign of the masquerade, the concept of self-identity is left symbolically ambiguous via the sign of the mask. Thus, I mean that the symbolic inconsistencies in the tale are so profound, because Poe has in the tale's second revision, by introducing the word Masque, indicated his problematizing of the question of identity. Where else does the 'mask' of identity reside but in the position of a 'differential' in relation to the integer masquerade (in this case zero instead of a whole number)? This fusion of theoretically antagonistic symbols (individual and group) again indicates that the text is comprehensive, since both the arabesque and grotesque layers are present. Through my role as a critic, I have attempted to simulate the arabesque-grotesque interaction via 'contextual deconstruction.'

The question of identity is indeed problematized in "The Masque of the Red Death," since the mummer arises from within the revel. However, this is only perceivable when one goes beyond the structured meaning of chapter one. By exempting the interaction of symbols from the realm of interpretation and by looking at the facade itself (the symbolic tapestry), incongruity and the disunity of effect appear everywhere. The 'irony and tension' which a standard deconstructionist reading sees prevalent in Poe's works (especially this one) is a result of the fact that the rudiments of the tale are transformed in the process of narrative discourse (interaction). As such, the foundations and the end result always vary in the tale; I have thus, on the one hand, given a structured reading in chapter one so as to work around the possible incongruities (irony and tension) that are ingrained in all building-blocks, when the latter are observed in relation to 'meaning' (chapter one). On the other hand, chapter two has assessed the symbolic inconsistencies without

keeping constantly in mind the narrative interaction, but it still appears 'contextual' because it is positioned after and behind the primary, structured reading of the text. This has been done so as to make it evident that possible readings of the Poe canon see generic irony as inherent to the texts, but that only if the critic is aware of both layers of the texts (the symbols and their interaction) is the 'refined' irony of open perspective seen as inherent, which labels the texts as Poe-esque. This refined irony further proves that Gothicism is not a part of Poe's "unity of effect" but rather its symbolic residue because it is subordinate 'in the act of being employed' to sustain a total impression-interaction; the 'flaw and tension' which typical deconstruction (if there is such a thing as typical deconstruction) reads into the tale indicates precisely that the Gothic decor merely resides in Poe's use of symbolic openness (whereby openness is falsely equated with uncanniness). This 'flaw and tension' which appears inherent to Poe's literature I have also labelled as being 'generic irony' a few times in my discussion. By this I hope to have gradually distinguished between irony (saying one thing and doing another, as does the character Prospero) and 'refined' irony (Poe's inscribing of totality into the text). Put simply, Poe's "unity of effect" embodies irony, for the viewing of disunity unifies it—via the presence of both meaning and symbol—chapters one and two.

(3) Theorizing a Reconciliation

I may be accused at this point of having created a conceptual discrepancy by providing two analyses of "The Masque of the Red Death"; namely, it was implied in the first reading that the intruder can easily be labelled as being the narrator as well, while in the second reading, via the discussion of the grotesque and arabesque principles, it was concluded that the return of the Red Death itself indicates a return of the narrator's full voice, which in turn ends the text. Put simply, it appears in one instance that the narrator is symbolized by the mummer, while in the other instance the narrator's presence resides in the 'textual enigma' (in relation to Prospero) of the Red Death. This argumentation may be deemed problematic because I have indicated that two varied symbols stand for the same figure in the text—the narrator. Most especially, the symbols appear varied because the intruder is not actually the Red Death itself. Roppolo explains this difference in the symbols: "The intruder is, literally, 'The *Mask* of the Red Death,' not the plague itself, nor even—as many would have it—the all-inclusive representation of Death" (141).

It is entirely correct that the intruder 'is not' the Red Death itself, but if we observe the symbol of the mummer contextually it still stands as 'the mask' of something more comprehensive in the text; the intruder, by being a representation of something more concrete, encapsulates within himself 'what it means' to be a symbol. More importantly, and in keeping with the tale's totality, it is entirely logical that the mummer is the mask of the narrator, by way of his masquerading as the Red Death; what appears as a conceptual discrepancy in the first place (my equating of both the mummer and the signified enigma with the narrator) is not really that antagonistic. In fact, both symbols stand for the same figure since one is a 'differentiated' imitation of the other; thus, it is enough for Prospero to merely look at the symbol of the narrator in order to realize his own subordination 'to mortality.' It is because of this latter effect that Roppolo correctly emphasizes the unique position which the Red Death holds in the text: "But, it will be remembered, Prince Prospero's world came into being *because* of the Red Death, which, although it includes death, is the principle of life" (143). In a similar fashion, it is the narrator who both speaks to the

reader of the prince's revelry and terminates the discourse; in practical terms, as indicated in the first discussion, the narrator speaks of the revelry because he was 'temporarily' (as the mummer) a part of it, but when we look upon the theoretical manifestations of literary construction which Poe has inscribed into the text, the narrator only speaks as the Red Death which begins and finishes the discourse.

The discrepancy between the mummer and the enigma is therefore subsumed by Poe's inscribing of the process of 'imaginative composition' within the narrative, and in that way, the narrator both exists as the intruder and the Red Death. He exists as the intruder in the textual sense because, as in non-textual reality, he must be a part of the revel at hand before he can speak to the curious about it, to those who did not attend; he exists as the Red Death itself in the holistic-theoretical sense because in imaginative composition, unlike the external world, the 'mental reality' which is constructed enacts a reverse mechanism of logic so that when the narrator withdraws from a particular thought it ceases to exist, and conversely, while that thought is existing, speculatively speaking, the imagined characters (like Prospero) are aware of its 'integral' evocation (the necessary, and not merely practical narrator). This fusion of aesthetic with theoretical reality is distinctive to the Poe-esque tale, for the fusion (as proven by the two varied symbols which stand for the narrator) is indicative of textual self-reflexiveness, the inscribing of the 'awareness' of interaction between symbol and meaning into the text itself. Therefore, the narrator enacts this self-reflexivity within Prospero's dominion, for he essentially masquerades 'as himself'—paradoxically, his real identity is proven when the garments fall to reveal nothing since his physical absence signifies his 'presence of voice'—and this paradoxical stance of the narrator further indicates Poe's insinuation of how criticism must remain aloof to analysis, undefined as a genre itself, for it to remain vital.

All of this has been said to problematize Roppolo's treatment of the tale, even though he effectively emphasizes that the intruder is only a mask. Again, this problematization (on Roppolo's part and on mine) reaffirms that the tale demonstrates the struggle between the group and the individual, as indicated earlier, for Prospero is also a type of mask, as an individual who is

constantly tied to the revelry. As such, the mummer (the mask of the enigma) directly emanates from the prince's 'mask of individual' and so, as Roppolo implies, death indeed emanates from the black room since it inspired the revelry in the first place. More significantly, Roppolo's comments allow for a critical re-working of the old psychoanalytic-biographical approach to Poe's works, so that the latter can be made more relevant to what is textually being stated; he implies the need for more appropriate analyses of Poe's tales by emphasizing the difference between 'the mask' and the Red Death itself, thereby indirectly linking individualism as espoused by the mummer with Prospero, so that both become secondary to the complete aestheticism of the narrative.

By speaking of 'old psychoanalytic' approaches, I am most notably referring to Princess Bonaparte's interpretation of the "Red Death" tale which sinks down in a web of antagonistic Freudian symbols (138). In regard to the secluded abbey, she immediately equates it with the mother's womb and thereby proceeds to analyze Poe himself through the actions of Prospero: "...Prince Prospero's imagination, which is responsible for all this, is typically sadistic and his sumptuous masquerade resembles the phantasies of some *enfant terrible* who, ignorant of adult genitality, can only delight in horrors. The Mother-abbey is, indeed, ravished, but only in the sadistic, cloacal fashion so well evoked by the sinister succession of halls and grimacing maskers" (Bonaparte 521). The complex relationship which the prince espouses in relation to the revelry itself is hardly infantile, and furthermore, to equate Poe with this character is a serious conceptual error which traditional psychoanalysis cannot admit due to its pseudo-biographical undercurrent; if we are to read Poe's thoughts into this tale, which we cannot do in the case of every tale, then we must look for them in the narrator's usually hidden voice (since this is basically a third-person narration).

Roppolo avoids such errors by implicitly linking the masked figure with Prospero, by emphasizing this figure's difference from the concept of the Red Death. As I have previously indicated, the intruder is symbolic of the main enigma since both are indicative of the narrator (who masquerades 'as himself' at the revel), but even though Roppolo does not contextualize the intruder effectively, and oddly because of this same lack, he avoids committing the further error of

linking the character of Prospero with the figure of the narrator, which Bonaparte appears to do by way of psycho-biography. Therefore, due to Roppolo's over-differentiation between the mask and the Red Death, Bonaparte's rendition of 'the mask' as the vengeful father-figure via Oedipal theory can be toned down and made relevant in regard to the text itself; in proper psychoanalytic fashion, it can be said that because Prospero's personality is inherently shadowy (by way of his wild exploits in decoration), the uncanniness arises directly from the grain of his creation, the black room, and encompasses all, since he is a part and parcel of his 'entire personality' and milieu, or as Knapp says in her symbolic reading of the tale, "when shadow characteristics exist potently in an individual, the demonic effect radiates outward" (165).

In fact, the psycho-biographical approach to Poe's tales, especially this one, inevitably becomes irrelevant since it appears to get caught up in the narrator's self-reflexiveness, via his masquerading as himself by being the intruder and the Red Death simultaneously. While arguing against the claim that the chaotic conclusion destroys the tale's unity, Roppolo quite rightly states the following: "In Chaos, then, is the promise of new lives and of new worlds which will swell into existence and then, in their turn, subside into nothingness in the eternal process of contraction and expansion which Poe describes in *Eureka*" (143). I have claimed that Roppolo 'quite rightly' brings *Eureka* into this tale's interpretive equation because, unlike critics who argue that it is a mistake to look upon the latter as being the culmination of Poe's theories, these theories, while defined in *Eureka*, are still demonstrated in their primary aesthetic formulations in the "Red Death" tale.

It is now necessary that we leave Roppolo's fruitful insights behind and look more closely at the theorization that is encapsulated in the narrator's unique position in relation to the revel. This is especially necessary because several critical approaches indirectly bring forth the Eurekian principles in relation to this text; both Bonaparte and Knapp appear to stumble across the theoretical comprehensiveness that Poe has interwoven into the narrative. Bonaparte psychoanalytically exposes the Eurekian aesthetics that are present by erroneously reading the following into the tale's conclusion: "A sort of 'end-of-the-world phantasy' as is met with in certain schizophrenics, closes this tale of revenge..." (524). Knapp symbolically hints at the Eurekian undercurrent by

emphasizing 'cosmicality' in the following: "The number seven may be looked upon as a cosmic centre: the seven planetary spheres, the seven notes of the scale, each functioning as a unit yet related to the others as a whole" (166). Either way, there is a need at this point to expand the discourse in order to account for the tale's unified comprehensiveness and subsequently, for Poe's successful internationalization as an author, especially because even Bonaparte's psycho-biographical approach appears to have stumbled upon something that is indeed relevant to the tale. Perhaps this is why Ola Hansson, a Swedish critic, wrote in one of his essays on Poe in the late 1880s on how literary revelation was "equally discoverable in science. It was distinctive of Poe's genius that he had anticipated the work of modern psychiatrists" (Anderson 79).

When concluding the third paragraph of this discussion, I had spoken of how the narrator reveals himself in a paradoxical fashion to the revellers, for "his real identity is proven when the garments fall to reveal nothing, since his physical absence signifies his presence of voice." I have also referred to this phenomenon at times as being 'self-reflexivity,' because the narrator as the mummer essentially masquerades 'as himself' at the revel. These complexities of relation which Poe has effectively inscribed into the text in part account for his tales' susceptibility to psychoanalytic evaluation, since the identity of the narrator appears to elude direct 'identification,' much like the symbolic openness that was earlier discussed easily allows for deconstructionist inreadings. Put simply, with reference to the grotesque-arabesque interaction of the tale, the narrator is set up as a figure and not a character who is a product of Prospero's milieu. As such, his position is inherently of a more theoretical and abstract nature than that of the prince and the courtiers, especially since he is symbolized by both a 'mask' and the 'Red Death,' so that his subsequent cosmicality within the text simultaneously encapsulates the complexities of relation that Poe discusses in *Eureka*, complexities that are precisely the result of the universe's self-reflexivity (which the narrator aesthetically embodies in this tale). Kennedy appears to have been one of the first critics who, regarding the "Red Death" tale, realized the unique position which the narrator holds; in fact, he exposes indirectly that Poe has once again inscribed the methods of literary composition within the text itself. I would further add that this inscribing sets up an equation in which the narrative

appears self-conscious, via the narrator's position, of its own structuring. Kennedy speaks of how "the cerements and mask are signs without a proper referent; they mark the semiotic impasse in which writing has begun to locate its own activity," via the Red Death which "is a presence-as-absence whose meaning is forever denied to presence and already accomplished in absence" (203). This comment is effective, for it takes into account the narrator-mummer's paradoxical existence within the tale—he proves his presence by way of absence. Taken further, in regard to my comment on how Poe has inscribed the methods of literary construction into this tale, it can be said that the narrator's paradoxical existence indicates his circumlocution of himself in order to structure an 'imaginative tale,' *per se*, which in retrospect (as indicated in the first discussion) appears as if Prospero and not the narrator has textually circumlocuted the enigma at hand (the Red Death), only to fail in his endeavors. Put succinctly, Poe has through the narrator's fluctuating position within the text set up a 'play of perspectives' that is indicative of the arabesque principle of design and that is further self-reflexive due to the fluidity of those perspectives: the narrator can be present as the intruder, the enigma, or both.

This 'complexity of relation' which the narrator exhibits in the text is further elaborated on by Poe himself when he speaks of the "impossibility of axioms" in *Eureka*: "It is seen...that the *axiomatic principle* itself is susceptible of variation, and of course that axioms are susceptible of similar change," so that to the understanding is presented "*no obviousness* of relation" since the latter is a "fluctuating principle" (Benton 66). In other words, the lack of axioms directly accounts for the narrator's ambiguity of relation in the "Red Death" tale. Granted, the narrator comes close to being an axiom due to his 'totality' within the text, as exemplified through the arabesque principle, but even that entirety of narrative voice is subject to periodic fluctuation: the fluctuation may not be noticeable precisely because of the narrator's holistic presence within the tale, that does not change, but every interpretation of his 'relation' to the narrative will read a variation into the tale's meaning, since every interpretation is itself a variation. In that way, the lack of the "axiomatic principle" in this work allows for the narrator to take up a self-reflexive, fluctuating position which Poe has inscribed as a parallel to 'critical awareness' of the text. This theory of the "impossi-

bility of axioms" which Poe speaks of I have indicated in the introduction as being interchangeable with his further definition of "truth as consistency" because the lack of axioms conversely indicates that there can be no truth in the typical sense of the word, if we look upon truth as being non-fluctuating. Poe speaks in *Eureka* as follows: "*A perfect consistency, I repeat, can be nothing but an absolute truth.* We may take it for granted, then, that Man cannot long or widely err, if he suffer himself to be guided by his poetical, which I have maintained to be his truthful, in being his symmetrical, instinct" (130). The logic of the discourse thus indicates that real consistency and subsequently "truth" rest in the "symmetrical instinct," and not in the belief in axioms. This symmetry which Poe describes as encompassing the universe is demonstrated in the narrator's relation to Prospero's world. The narrator's fluctuating position (his multi-symbolization) proves the lack of an axiomatic reality but still allows for the principle of symmetry, which I had earlier deemed the 'arabesque design,' to exist amid the totality of the text. Hence, the real aestheticism of the tale rests in the presentation of open perspectives, whereby holistic truth leads to axiomatic inreadings. Poe has thus delicately inscribed within the text a type of deductive reasoning that not only mimics the set-up of his purely ratiocinative tales but further 'calls forth' critical interpretations (inreadings) of the text at hand. The self-reflexiveness of the narrator subsequently makes the tale highly susceptible to psychoanalytic interpretations. On a more thematic note, Prospero can be said to fail in his endeavors at seclusion because his set-up of the masquerade attempts to replace authentic art with a synthetic art that appears to negate the methods of artistic composition via the illusion of 'creative spontaneity,' which Poe actually objected to in "The Philosophy of Composition" as being indicative of authorial vanity. In short, Prospero's syntheticism leaves out any consideration for the structuring of the narrative voice which Poe elaborates on in *Eureka*: "He must have a care, however, lest, in pursuing too heedlessly the superficial symmetry of forms and motions, he leave out of sight the really essential symmetry of the principles which determine and control them" (130). Perhaps it is because of Poe's aversion to spontaneous literature that when Hansson's essay appeared in the *Vossische Zeitung* in 1889, the writer Strindberg complimented it but with serious reservations: "Your essay on Poe is fine!...But—poetry without philosophy is

nix" (Anderson 138)! Evidently, of the two, Poe had "left the deepest impression on Strindberg" (138).

A year after Kennedy's brief yet relevant comments regarding the narrator's complex position in the "Red Death" tale, in 1988, the critic Clive Bloom came out with an effective study that outlines the similarities between Freud's psychoanalysis and Poe's method of composition. More precisely, in his chapter dealing with *Eureka*, he speaks of Poe's implementation of the "absent object of analysis" within narrative. Regarding nebulae, Bloom speaks of how Poe considers his theory correct that the universe began with nebulae precisely because nebulae "no longer" exist: "Absence becomes proof of existence...within a language that denies the presence of the objects under analysis. By this denial Poe, is ironically, forced to create a presence, providing a figurative language in which to speak of the analytic object's non-presence" (47). This essentially reaffirms Kennedy's own thoughts on the "Red Death" tale, namely, that when the mummer's mask falls, "writing has begun to locate its own activity"; however, I had earlier spoken of how the narrator's paradoxical existence within the text indicates his circumlocution of himself, in order to structure the imaginative plot at hand, and it is with regard to the presence of circumlocution in Poe's tales that Bloom offers some effective theorization in his next chapter. He states: "'Circumlocution' tantalizes yet leads the reader away from the central mystery, whereas communication should normally be 'curt, precise and clear' allowing such a narrative directly to connect with facts at the heart. Such a narrative would be ideal in so far as that narrative would totally absent itself in the presence of its meaning" (79). That narrative would appear ideal in the minimalist sense, since it would exist as the 'narrator minus the narrative' (a type of direct elocution, if you will). However, the comprehensive set-up of Poe's tale precisely requires that the narrative appear solid, via Prospero's machinations, so that the narrator can insinuate his voice into the already present solidity, thereby providing a total aesthetic effect of both symbol and meaning, and the 'awareness' of both by way of his reflexivity amid the text, since he simultaneously partakes of it and remains remote (as the intruder and the Red Death). What this reflexivity does is to balance between narrator (subjective discourse) and narrative (objective text, as an entity) in such a way

that the effect of aesthetic balance (which is ambiguity) allows for criticism to further add to the already comprehensive set-up. Bloom is correct in speaking of circumlocution in regard to Poe's works because this technique allows for frequent psychoanalytic misinterpretation, since psychoanalysis' "dimension is in language," and "language will (for Poe, Freud and Saussure) therefore both 'express' the thought and 'create' the thought" (72). This is not to say that psychoanalytic readings have nothing to offer in regard to Poe's works but that they are only effective, much like deconstruction, if contextualized; the Freudian symbolism provides interesting readings of the "Red Death" tale as demonstrated by Bonaparte but those readings are only effective if they remain within the bounds of the text, within Prospero's dominion. Bloom provides a fine summary of why psycho-biography has long plagued Poe's works: "As Poe's romantic idealism completes itself in sublimity so psychologies based upon the observation of neurosis label that idealism with bathetic concepts of materialist explanations" (77).

The paradoxical presence-absence of the narrator within the text I had also spoken of as being indicative of "Poe's insinuation of how criticism must remain aloof to analysis, undefined as a genre, for it to remain vital," since the narrator, as both the mummer and the Red Death, eludes identification. Due to this ambiguous position which the narrator's critical voice holds within the "Red Death" tale in particular, post-structuralist criticism at times erroneously reads the sign of the 'Other' into Poe's aesthetic formulation, that hearkens back to the deconstructionist inreadings of 'flaw and tension' into the symbolic openness of the tale (which I spoke of in the second discussion). In particular, I am thinking of Elmer's *Reading at the Social Limit: Affect, Mass Culture, and Edgar Allan Poe*, in which he speaks in one of the chapters of Poe's duplicitous-perverse relationship as an author with society, via his avoidance of defining criticism as a genre. He speaks as follows: "...Poe's insistence that criticism never succumb to generic status, that it remain so purely a principle of distinction as to never coincide with its own self-definition, is at once the exemption from, and the guarantee of, the symbolic order in which the commodification of text and identity constitutes the way of doing business" (63). I am willing to state at this point that while Poe's non-defining of criticism may appear paradoxical in relation to society, much like the narrator's posi-

tion in relation to Prospero and his milieu, that same ambiguous relationship that is subsequently set up between the two opposites (critical voice and aesthetic thematics) allows for the vitality of both to continue, as proven by the tale's chaotic conclusion which has resonance with the main principle of *Eureka*, namely, that while creation-presence-thematics leads to chaos-absence-criticism, the converse will also occur, whereby criticism will logically lead to future, ostensibly better thematics.

I have made several links in the above sentence precisely because Poe's tale allows for this, and in fact, necessitates contextuality. Put simply, if we chance to realize Poe's insinuation of the process of literary criticism into the "Red Death" tale by way of the narrator's ambiguous position, then it is only logical that Prospero's thematics are being complemented by the non-thematic vitality of the narrator's voice, and Prospero's aestheticism will in turn lead to the critical dénouement which will in turn lead to other tales by Poe. Elmer thus appears to have mistaken Poe's concept of the "reciprocity of adaptation" that is the mark of a perfect plot for the structuring of a perverse relationship of 'artist and society,' or in simpler terms, he has mistaken theory for practicality. Poe elaborates on this theory which the narrator's self-reflexivity interweaves into the tale in *Eureka*: he speaks of how the dénouement must spring "out of the bosom of the thesis—out of the heart of the ruling idea...arising as a result of the primary proposition—as inseparable and inevitable part and parcel of the fundamental conception of the book" (Benton 134). Elmer's error rests in the attempt to place Poe's aesthetics forcibly into the public sphere, which is in part a result of the post-structuralist focus (cultural materialist obsession) with, as his phrase shows, "commodification" and "business." In keeping with this indirect attempt to commodify Poe as an artist, Elmer interjects the following phrase, which is related to his previous remark: "Poe champions originality and uniqueness so that, paradoxically, he can secure the smooth functioning of the world of circulation that cares nothing for those values and that actively undermines them" (63).

In my first discussion regarding this tale, I had spoken of how Prospero's failure is in part a result of his championing of merely 'thematic originality' that works by way of repetition (hence the circular masquerade); however, since the narrator stands as the critical vitality of the tale, it can

be further stated that he champions 'conceptual originality,' the latter being the one which Poe himself supports. In that way, the 'originality and uniqueness' which Poe *appears* to be championing via the thematics (Prospero and his milieu) are indeed, however remotely, tied to the "world of circulation" (mass consumerism), but the true conceptual originality which is not repetitious since linked to the narrator's fluidity of relation amid the text, and which Poe actually supports, is indeed distinct from the greater 'social mass,' since this finer originality 'of ideas' is non-marketable, and therefore, literary criticism must also remain undefined so as to escape marketization (the discourse of the generic). At this point in the discussion, such discourse appears most similar to the older psycho-biographical approach to Poe's works, since both attempt to reduce the aesthetics of an author who has not set up his tales to allow for effective reductionist readings: psycho-biography and cultural materialism thus 'personalize' and 'consumerize' Poe's literature, respectively.

This is not to say that Elmer's reading is ineffective, but rather, that the post-structuralist canopy (a vague notion to begin with) and its more specific theoretical outbranches can provide more relevant insights into such tales if also contextualized (applied to the text as an aesthetic design that *may* embody cultural fragments rather than as a cultural fragment that *may* embody aesthetic devices). Elmer, in a later chapter of his study, correctly refers to *Eureka* when discussing Poe's aesthetics, thereby acknowledging the 'comprehensive' importance of this work in most of the tales, as well. However, because he views Poe's adherence to 'thematic originality' as being genuine, rather than the conceptual one, he inreads 'mass consumerism' into this ostensibly theoretical work: "...we can begin to see the social narrative inscribed in every line of Poe's cosmological fantasy, for *Eureka* is the confrontation of self and mass expanded to the limits of the universe and consequently exhibits the ambivalence towards the social limit of all his texts" (218). This confrontation between 'self and mass' which consumerist discourses read into Poe's works is in actuality, when we observe the theoretical-critical grain that runs through those works, a demonstration of the confrontation between 'self and non-self,' which further accounts for the narrator's self-reflexivity, his being both a figure (the mummer) and an idea (the Red Death).

Poe insinuates the following question into the tale, among the obvious existential ones: What is it that actually determines 'individuality,' is it only the mind, or the entire person? The answer is doubled, as the narrator's position indicates: in the generic sense, the entire person determines individuality, whereas in the true, conceptual sense, only the mental originality determines it. Again, Poe is through the narrator effectively speaking as both a constructor of literature and 'an artist.' This is precisely why I have spoken of how *Eureka*, and therefore the "Red Death" tale as well, demonstrate the conflict between 'self and non-self'; I have substituted 'non-self' for Elmer's "mass" since the latter misreading locates 'otherness' within Poe's works. This mass-Other is in fact external to Poe's aesthetics, if we take care to note that the narrator's reflexivity is indicative of the individual's struggle for self-comprehension outside the presence of social conditioning, an inherently 'false axiom.' Social conditioning is demonstrated by the duplicitous relationship between Prospero and the revel, but the narrator's doubleness in the text (as mummer and Red Death) is a sign of reflexivity/referentiality rather than of 'other'-conditioning due to his remoteness to the affair at hand: he speaks of it but is not a part of it, via the dropping of his mask which reveals absence. In the following few paragraphs, I shall attempt to elaborate on post-structuralism's error of reading the Other into Poe's literature (which does not incorporate generic realities such as 'commodity, consumerism, and marketable originality').

What literary criticism does by emphasizing an otherness which it wishes to see inherent in Poe's texts is actually circumlocuting the subject of the text at hand (the 'I' figure, of the narrator). This in fact parallels Prospero's folly of circumlocuting the main enigma of the text (the Red Death as narrator) which he views, thematically speaking, as being the non-textual Other in relation to his masquerade, his own discourse: in contrast, this enigma is integral to the survival of the prince's artistry as well, whereby it cannot possibly possess otherness due to its functional role within the text. To be more precise, it appears that criticism mistakes the narrational 'remoteness-ambiguity of tone' for a genuine otherness, that is in fact not present in Poe's works. Put bluntly, the Poe-esque tale is subsequently avoided in an analytical fashion by the critic's frequent indulgences on the 'vitality' of the Other in relation to the textual set-up, because that Other shifts the

reader's attention without the analysis that should be the primary objective (of the text itself, of the 'I' figure).

The frequency of this error in discourse, on the part of critics, rests in their failure (due to Poe's subtlety of aesthetics) to distinguish between symbol and meaning, between a word-subject and the definition of it. In that way, the Other is incorrectly made, and quite naturally becomes the main focus of the critic's discourse because the textual 'I' (the Poe tale, *per se*) is indeed different from the critical 'I,' wherein the definitive variation between the two points of relation (within discussion) labels the subject of analysis (the tale's 'I') as being intrinsically linked to the thought-up concept of the Other. The problem rests in the interchangeability of the subject-symbol 'I.' Observe: two symbols-words within a dictionary are given two varied and corresponding definitions, and it is subsequently easy to predict the definitive difference simply by way of the symbolic difference between the two words—they indeed are different. Now, in the case of the critic's relation to the Poe text, the problem of the Other arises on account of the symbolic interchangeability of the subject 'I,' to which I have referred. The textual 'I' (of the Poe-esque narrator) varies in definition from the thoughts-interpretations of the critical 'I,' because we are speaking of two focal points (the critic versus the narrator). The inherent problem is that the symbolic appellations of these two definitive differentials are still equivalent and thus visually the same. Both the critic's analytical momentum is an 'I' as is the textual narration of the Poe story an 'I,' but since these two points have their natural difference further emphasized in the process of critical analysis (criticism as different from primary text), the textual 'I' risks the error of being branded mutually inclusive with otherness and at times, as in post-structuralist criticism, interchangeable with the Other that the critic has mentioned in the first place, since the former's definition (of the textual 'I,' which the critic constructs) is inevitably to differ from the critic's own 'I' as a filtrative voice of the text at hand, which in fact mimics the narrator's own role. And so, by mentioning and making the Other an intricate, established part of Poe's form of discourse (of his texts), the critic thereby commits the sin of 'mass consumerism,' the "Mob" (as Poe calls it), demagogy, and textual-aesthetic annihilation that this otherness was mentioned as symbolizing in the first place, and which is actually

antagonistic to Poe's type of story, that survives by way of antagonism to that Other and not by dint of incorporation and reconciliation. Hence, Poe's stories exhibit many un-dead figures which keep re-surfacing because his aesthetic comprehensiveness defies reduction. The un-dead figures are proof of the tales' resistance to otherness.

In this light, Elmer's thoughts on *Eureka*, a work which also rudimentally exists within the "Red Death" tale, appear to miss Poe's comprehensiveness of structure. Elmer claims: "Nevertheless, just as Poe must admit that attraction eventually wins out over repulsion (otherwise there is no final return to original simplicity), the vulgar mass incrementally wins out in its exertion of a kind of gravitational pull, an influence on the philosophic, who are biased toward this fancy" (220). This phrasing does not take into account Poe's comments on the structure of the universe itself, namely, that it is 'pulsating'; therefore, the "vulgar mass" does not win out over "the philosophic" (the literary critic, et cetera), but rather, the text and its critical parallel both necessitate and complement each other's individual vitality. By misreading otherness into Poe's tales, the critic in turn is forced to look upon Poe's relationship as an artist to the social mass in which his texts were distributed as being perverse, in the sense that his indirect pinpointing of otherness within textual discourse (social imperfection) simultaneously deems his aesthetics imperfect, because they too originate here (have their inspirational source in this mass consumerism). Elmer thus argues that Poe's narrators exhibit in some tales the complexities of the "small other" in their encounter with a symbol that stands for the social mass (via Lacan's *objet a* that is forever remote to comprehension), such as the case of doubleness in "William Wilson," an example which he uses, while in different works, most notably *Eureka*, he speaks of how Poe displays a perverse relationship to his literary market by directly inscribing the presence of the "vulgar mass" as a "big Other" (the universe's final return to unity, whereby unity is equated with the 'other'), even though *Eureka* implicitly says that unity requires process. And so, non-material otherness must simultaneously lead to individualized creation, whereby the error of 'perversion' is read into Poe's texts when the process of discourse (evocation and negation) is taken as a static point in time, and thus appears an anomaly.

I have spoken of how this type of discourse appears to circumlocute Poe's thematics precisely because, if we use the case of post-structuralism's focus on 'mass consumerism and commodity' (as exemplified in cultural materialism), we can read otherness into just about any tale by any writer, including Poe, in the sense that literature's survival is tied to the mass market even though some authors do not wish to follow the standards, or non-standards, of that mass. We could even be more theoretical in regard to otherness than Elmer, and subsequently could argue that because of the 'uncanniness' of Poe's texts, they all function as 'other' not only in relation to society, but also in relation to the reader as individual: put simply, we could state that every narrator in Poe's works is a "small other" (individual peculiarity) in relation to the thematic "big Other" (social peculiarity), as demonstrated by the narrator's paradoxical relation to Prospero and milieu in the "Red Death" tale—the narrator provides the latter with both life and death.

Renza, in a critical review of Elmer's otherness discourse, appears to have also exposed some of that discourse's peculiarities, and in fact, he makes some interesting comments regarding Poe's artistry by speaking briefly of the "Red Death" tale. He talks of how "Prospero's very name suggests a condensed anagram for 'Poe's prose' as much as a reference to Shakespeare's artist-figure" (28). This is an interesting fusion, but I would further say that it also misses Poe's subtlety of thematics; if we view the narrator as being Poe's 'mask' in this particular tale, then the aesthetics-thematics which Prospero evokes are actually antagonistic to the narrator's position within the text, irrespective of whether the narrator is symbolized by the intruder, the Red Death itself, or both. More precisely, the narrator's 'fluidity of presence' in the tale indicates, if anything, Poe's attempt to inscribe a genuine, hidden personality behind the narrator's mere voice. I have said 'mere,' since this is ostensibly a third-person narrative, or is at least set up as one. This stance on my part should not be mistaken for the psycho-biographical attempt to equate Poe with the 'first-person' narrators: while speaking indirectly in this tale perhaps, Poe never speaks directly, for to do so would ruin the text's openness (the presence of two 'I's and one 'me' is more so an emphasis on narrative presence than on the lack of third-person, as I mentioned earlier, and thus non-contaminating). Even though Renza equates Prospero with Poe, which is in itself a lesser evil than

equating the author with 'all' of the narrator's, this fusion allows for him to theorize an effective insight in regard to the text's main theme, the Red Death itself: "Moreover, as an inscription of Poe's own authorial self, the Prospero figure, even with his privileged ability to know (or read) the tale's artistic gambit...is also led quite literally to merge with this mass-cultural 'red'/'read' death" (28). This is interesting on Renza's part to have equated the tale's thematic reality with its relation to the reader, so that quite logically, when Prospero's aesthetics have been "read" they shall in turn 'die' within the reader's mind since no longer being the focus of attention.

This play on "red" and "read" further indicates that it is the narrator, as the intruder and 'inevitable death' of Prospero's milieu, who is intrinsically responsible for the prince's attempt at seclusion, or rather, at an idea's attempt not to be evoked. Prospero is set up in such a way, within the text, so as to appear to understand that his evocation is also his death. This also accounts for the narrator's fluidity within the text (his double symbolization via both mummer and enigma) because Poe has here inscribed the fine game of 'hide and seek' by way of Prospero's failed seclusion, a game that is both literary and elemental, as espoused by Dupin's ratiocination and *Eureka's* theorizing, respectively (I had earlier spoken of it as being a 'play on perspectives'). Suffice it to say that Renza offers effective, possible readings of the "Red Death" tale due to his skepticism of Elmer's otherness discourse in regard to Poe's works, and so, he exposes the limitations of such ways of analyzing those works: "That is, merely trying to disclose Poe's Othering role inevitably falls into the trap of becoming an alibi for repetitive experiences of narrative excitement, itself predicated on the quasi-contradictions (e.g., the resistance/attraction of the self to mass society) generated by these socio-symbolic codes" (32). More precisely, Prospero creates "an alibi for repetitive experiences of narrative excitement" (the masquerade) by playing the "Othering role" in relation to the concept of the Red Death, the theme itself. To summarize, it can be said that when Poe speaks, in this case as a critic-narrator (an 'I'-individual), he comments on another who appears as 'an other' if not taken within the context of discourse (the character Prospero as a textual individual), because the text demonstrates the variance between individualized ways of thought and subsequently, the imperfection of all communication systems, irrespective of the social limitation to

comprehend this imperfection, which is a limitation that lies outside of the text.

I had a few paragraphs back spoken of how, in relation to Poe's works, criticism at times "mistakes the narrational remoteness-ambiguity of tone for a genuine otherness, that is in fact not present." I had deemed it "remoteness-ambiguity of tone" precisely because of the narrator's comprehensive positioning within the tale: he is the mummer, a part of the masquerade-thematics, and is the Red Death, the theoretical reality that defines the 'structure' of the thematics. Therefore, it can be concluded that Poe's main reason for refusing to define criticism as a genre, by way of the narrator's fluid position, was to leave it indicative of open-mindedness, and more significantly, indicative of the critic's necessity to 'adapt' discourse to the thematics which are being analyzed. On a less theoretical note, the ambiguity of tone which Poe implements in the case of Prospero's revel appears to more modern assumptions regarding literary construction as a genuine otherness, simply because the concept of determinism, that may now indeed appear alien, is imbedded in the textual aesthetics. Spitzer indirectly evokes Prospero's duplicity in relation to his milieu (the revel) by speaking of this concept: "With 19th century determinism, mankind has developed far from the harmoniousness of Greek thought" and "is now embedded in a milieu which may enclose him protectively like a shell, but may also represent his doom and weigh him down with its unshakeable reality" (62-3). This statement in part also accounts for Poe's preference of the short story format, since it best encapsulates this determinism in a structural fashion, and allows for the narrator's ambiguity of tone to hasten that determinism in the thematics, in an interplay between text and character-function that is indeed, as Poe would say, a "totality of effect or impression." Spitzer then takes his discussion further, and citing "The Fall of the House of Usher," he argues that to "ask Roderick to 'resist' his environment when his character is meant to be the poetic embodiment of determinism is not consonant with the historical understanding of the climate of the story written in 1839—the story reflects what has been correctly called 'le réalisme des romantiques'" (63). While I have implicitly argued that Poe is more "Poe-esque" than Romantic, it cannot be argued that "The Masque of the Red Death" was not written three, and subsequently revised six years, after the former tale's completion. Put simply, Prospero displays the same complexities

which determinism gives rise to that Usher dealt with, if only on a larger scale, via the comprehensiveness of the narrator's third-person positioning.

Conclusion

I prefer to describe Poe's works as "Poe-esque" precisely because, as demonstrated by the comprehensive totality of meaning that can be read into "The Masque of the Red Death," his aesthetics label him an internationally seminal writer. It was indicated in the introductory lines of this study that he developed the 'horror story' proper and the ratiocinative tale by re-molding the elements of the former, and that he laid down the groundwork of 'pure' poetry and the main devices of the "Theatre of the Absurd"; all of these aspects, some as undercurrents rather than main elements, can be said to be present in the tale. This is not to say that the chosen text for analysis is most typical of Poe, but rather, that it is an analytical oddity because of its incorporation of several of Poe's literary talents: it is interwoven with both aesthetic (Prospero) and critical (the remote narrator) levels, so that, depending on how one goes about analyzing the tale, different meanings shall always result.

In the first chapter, an 'implicitly structural' analysis was brought forth to indicate how Poe's works offer a greater chance than is usual in literature of giving 'odd yet relevant' interpretations of the thematics, most notably in this case owing to Prospero's duplicity in relation to the revel. The second chapter was brought in to expose Poe's openness of symbolism in the tale, the 'intentional gaps' as I had said, in order to account for that earlier, positive susceptibility to critical interpretation; the interaction of the 'grotesque' and 'arabesque' principles was also looked at, so as to demonstrate how they complement each other. The third chapter was presented mainly to fuse possible interpretations of this tale, in order to account for the 'openness of symbolism' that was exposed by way of deconstruction (or at least partial deconstruction) in the previous chapter. Put simply, I have offered a type of three-sided analysis to demonstrate Poe's inscription of 'literary comprehensiveness' within aesthetic thematics, that in turn accounts for the multi-fluency of the tales. We can even deem it 'reverse inscription,' for interpretive openness is being funneled into the narrow space of precise thematics, as exemplified when the narrator's symbolic fluidity of presence is inscribed by Prospero into the 'secluded' theme at hand. Therefore, as I had implied in

the introduction, Poe's "unity of effect" embodies irony as a process, rather than a point of inconsistency as some forms of deconstruction would label it, precisely because that single effect remains 'unified' due to Poe's inverted inscription of criticism into thematics, whereby conceptual openness paradoxically requires the thematic narrowness of focus, as do Prospero's limitations give rise to the Red Death, or conversely, as the narrator inscribes himself into Prospero's limited milieu.

I had, however, spoken of the final effect as being *spectral* rather than merely concrete or ironic, since the narrator's interaction with the prince and revel is structurally fluid due to his ambiguous positioning within the text: he is symbolized by the mummer and is self-symbolized by the textual enigma itself, the Red Death. In keeping with Poe's complexity of aesthetics and theory, it was thus argued that not only is the Gothic element of the mere facade subsumed by the sustaining of a final interactive effect, but also the psychoanalytic readings, some deconstructionist readings (those which focus on generic irony and tension), and some post-structuralist readings, such as cultural materialist ones (if we regard deconstruction as being transitional from structuralism to post-structuralism), must be contextualized (related to the text in its 'totality,' or rather, *co-textualized*) before any true relevancy is to arise in relation to the tale, because the tale itself offers the possible interpretive answers. The text already *textualizes context*, while critical misreading attempts to *contextualize text*. Another way to theorize this reversal is to say, with particular reference to Poe's tale, that the tale as an aesthetic design circumlocutes (unifies) non-textual fragmentation, while critical misreading fragments that primary textual circumlocution.

It is enough to say that Poe's set-up of thematic circumlocution, on Prospero's part, subsequently keeps invigorated the art of critical circumlocution, of literary criticism by way of thematic inspiration (as in my case), and in a way, that totality of correspondence is the inherent "unity of effect" which the author inscribed into his works. It is a type of conceptual rather than merely thematic unity (and hence not generic, to Poe's satisfaction) which is only sustainable by continuous and gyrating discourse, which makes of the text a larger text via intratextuality.

"And then,...all is silent save the voice of the clock" (Harrison 4:254).

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